

Romances of Alexandre Dumas.

D'ARTAGNAN EDITION.



ILLUSTRATED.

VOLUME VII.



Love Disdained.

Drawn and etched by E. Van Muyden.

THE TWO DIANAS, II. *Frontispiece.*

The Romances of Alexandre Dumas

D'ARTAGNAN EDITION

THE TWO DIANAS ♣ A ROMANCE
OF THE REIGN OF HENRI II. ♣ BY
ALEXANDRE DUMAS ♣ VOLUME TWO ♣



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CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. DURING THE BOMBARDMENT	1
II. WITHIN THE TENT	14
III. SMALL CRAFT SOMETIMES SAVE LARGE MEN- OF-WAR	23
IV. OBSCURI SOLA SUB NOCTE	36
V. BETWEEN TWO CHASMS	44
VI. ARNAULD DU THILL, THOUGH ABSENT, CON- TINUES TO EXERT A FATAL INFLUENCE ON THE DESTINY OF POOR MARTIN-GUERRE .	51
VII. LORD WENTWORTH AT BAY	61
VIII. LOVE DISDAINED	71
IX. LOVE REQUITED	81
X. LE BALAFRÉ	91
XI. PARTIAL DÉNOUEMENT	103
XII. HAPPY OMENS	116
XIII. A QUATRAIN	132
XIV. THE VICOMTE DE MONTGOMMERY	146
XV. JOY AND ANGUISH	157
XVI. PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES	164
XVII. THE SECRET PRISONER	171
XVIII. THE COMTE DE MONTGOMMERY	177

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIX. THE KNIGHT-ERRANT	186
XX. IN WHICH ARNAULD DU THILL APPEARS ONCE MORE	198
XXI. JUSTICE IN A QUANDARY	207
XXII. WHEREIN IT SEEMS AS IF THE MISUNDER- STANDINGS WERE ABOUT TO BEGIN AGAIN	219
XXIII. A CRIMINAL'S SPEECH AGAINST HIMSELF .	230
XXIV. JUSTICE	241
XXV. TWO LETTERS	255
XXVI. A PROTESTANT CONVENTICLE	265
XXVII. ANOTHER TRIAL	281
XXVIII. A PERILOUS STEP	292
XXIX. THE IMPRUDENCE OF PRECAUTION . . .	300
XXX. OPPORTUNITY	311
XXXI. BETWEEN TWO DUTIES	320
XXXII. OMENS	328
XXXIII. THE FATAL JOUST	335
XXXIV. A NEW ORDER OF AFFAIRS	345
XXXV. RESULTS OF GABRIEL'S VENGEANCE . . .	354
XXXVI. CHANGE OF TEMPERATURE	365
XXXVII. GUISE AND COLIGNY	377
XXXVIII. REPORTS AND DENUNCIATIONS	386
XXXIX. A SPY	394
XL. AN INFORMER	405
XLI. A CHILD KING AND QUEEN	416
XLII. END OF THE ITALIAN JOURNEY	426
XLIII. TWO APPEALS	438
XLIV. A PERILOUS CONFIDENCE	444
XLV. THE DISLOYALTY OF LOYALTY	455
XLVI. THE BEGINNING OF THE END	463
XLVII. THE FOREST OF CHÂTEAU-REGNAULT . .	472

CHAPTER	PAGE
XLVIII. A GLIMPSE AT THE POLITICS OF THE SIX- TEENTH CENTURY	480
XLIX. THE TUMULT OF AMBOISE	488
L. AN ACT OF FAITH	496
LI. ANOTHER SPECIMEN OF POLITICS	508
LII. A RAY OF HOPE	517
LIII. WELL-GUARDED SLUMBER	524
LIV. A KING'S DEATH-BED	532
LV. ADIEU, FRANCE!	543
CONCLUSION	554

THE TWO DIANAS.

CHAPTER I.

DURING THE BOMBARDMENT.

LORD DERBY was quite right in his conjectures. This is what had happened : —

The troops of Monsieur de Nevers, having made a rapid junction during the night with those of the Duc de Guise, had arrived unexpectedly by forced marches before Fort Ste. Agathe. Three thousand arquebusiers, supported by twenty-five or thirty horsemen, had carried the fort in less than an hour.

Lord Wentworth and Lord Derby reached the fort of Nieullay only in time to see their forces fleeing across the bridge to seek shelter behind the second, stronger line of fortifications of Calais.

But when the first moment of bewilderment had passed, we must admit that Lord Wentworth bore himself valiantly and well. After all, his was a noble soul, in which the pride for which his race was noted had implanted marvellous vigor.

“These Frenchmen must indeed be mad!” he said in perfect seriousness to Lord Derby. “But we will make

them pay dear for their madness. Two centuries ago Calais held out a year against the English, and in their hands maintained a siege of ten years. However, we shall have no need to put forth such endurance as that. Before the end of the week, Derby, you will see the enemy beating an inglorious retreat. He has taken everything that he can carry by surprise. Now we are on our guard. So be reassured, and laugh with me at this blunder on the part of Monsieur de Guise."

"Do you mean to send to England for reinforcements?" asked Lord Derby.

"What need is there of doing so?" was the governor's proud reply. "If our reckless foes persist in their rash undertaking, in less than three days, and while Nieullay still holds them in check, all the Spanish and English forces in France will come to our assistance of their own motion. And if these haughty invaders seem to be hopelessly obstinate, why, a message sent to Dover will bring us ten thousand men in twenty-four hours. But until then let us not do them too much honor by showing too much alarm. Our nine hundred soldiers and our strong walls will give them all the work they want. They will not penetrate beyond the bridge of Nieullay!"

Nevertheless, on the following day, January 1, 1558, the French were already masters of that bridge which Lord Wentworth had designated as the utmost limit of their advance. They had opened trenches during the night, and before noon they were battering the bridge to pieces.

It was to the terrible and regular accompaniment of the double cannonading that a solemn and gloomy family drama was being enacted in the old Peuquoy dwelling.

As the urgent questions addressed by Pierre Peuquoy to Gabriel's messenger have doubtless given the reader

to understand, Babette had not been able long to hide from her brother and her cousin her tears and their moving cause.

Misery did not indeed come to her by halves, poor child! The reparation which the false Martin-Guerre owed her was due not to herself alone, but to her child as well; for Babette was about to become a mother.

However, when she confessed her fault and its bitter consequences, she did not dare to tell Pierre and Jean that her future was without hope because Martin-Guerre was married.

She hardly admitted it even to her own heart. She would say to herself that it was impossible; that Monsieur d'Exmès must have been mistaken; and that God, who is kind and merciful, would not thus overwhelm and leave without resource a poor, wretched creature whose only fault had been that she had loved too well! She would artlessly repeat this childish reasoning to herself day after day, and would thus still retain some hope. She relied on Martin-Guerre; she relied on Vicomte d'Exmès. Why? Alas! she knew not; but still she hoped on.

Nevertheless, the absolute silence of both master and servant during those never-ending two months had been a fearful blow to her.

She waited with restless impatience, not unmixed with terror, for the 1st of January, which was the extreme limit of time allowed to Vicomte d'Exmès by Pierre Peuquoy.

So it was that the report, vague at first, and afterward indubitable, which spread through the city on December 31, that the French were marching upon Calais, caused her heart to leap with joy unspeakable.

She heard her brother and her cousin say that Vicomte d'Exmès would surely be among the assailants. Then of

course Martin-Guerre would be there too; so Babette was justified in her hopes.

Nevertheless, she received with anguish at her heart Pierre Peuquoy's request, on the 1st of January, to come down into the parlor on the first floor, to have some conversation with Jean and himself as to what was best to be done under existing circumstances.

She made her appearance, pale and trembling, before this domestic tribunal, so to speak, which was, however, constituted of only those two men, who had an almost paternal fondness for her.

"My dear cousin, dear brother," she said with faltering voice, "here I am at your commands."

"Be seated, Babette," said Pierre, pointing to a chair which he had placed for her near his own.

Then he continued gently but very gravely, —

"At the beginning of our trouble, Babette, when our urgent questions and our alarm induced you to confess the sad truth to us, I am ashamed to remember that I had not sufficient control of myself to restrain my first impulse of anger and sorrow: I insulted you, I even threatened you; but fortunately for us both, Jean interposed."

"May God bless him for his kindness and his indulgence!" said Babette, turning to her cousin, with her eyes swimming in tears.

"Say no more about it, Babette; say no more about it," rejoined Jean, more moved than he cared to show. "I did very little indeed; and after all, the way to remedy your suffering was not to give you new cause for grief."

"So I finally realized," said Pierre. "Your repentance and your tears touched me too, Babette; my rage melted into pity, and my pity into tenderness; and I forgave you for staining our hitherto stainless name."

"Jesus will be merciful to you as you have been to me, my brother."

"Then, too," continued Pierre, "Jean reminded me that your misery might perhaps not be irreparable, and that he who had led you into error was bound legally and morally to extricate you from it."

Babette held her crimson face still lower. Singularly enough, when another than herself seemed to believe in the possibility of reparation, she herself lost all hope.

Pierre continued, —

"Despite that hope, which I welcomed with delight, of seeing your honor and ours re-established, Martin-Guerre has said never a word, and the messenger sent to Calais by Monsieur d'Exmès a month since brought no news of your seducer. But now the French are before our walls, I presume Vicomte d'Exmès and his squire are among them."

"You may be perfectly sure of that, Pierre," interposed Jean.

"I shall not contradict you, Jean. Let us assume that Monsieur d'Exmès and his squire are at this moment separated from us only by the walls and moats which protect us, or which protect the English, I should say. In that event, if we do see them again, Babette, how do you think that we ought to receive them, — as friends or foes?"

"Whatever you do will be well done, my brother," said Babette, in great alarm at the turn the conversation was taking.

"But, Babette," said her brother, "can you form no idea as to their intentions?"

"Indeed I cannot, God help me! I am simply waiting, — that's all."

"So, then, you don't know whether they are coming

to save our honor, or to abandon us to our shame; whether the cannon which are playing an accompaniment to my words announce to us the approach of benefactors whom we ought to bless in our hearts, or treacherous villains who must be punished? Can you not tell me that, Babette?"

"Alas!" said Babette, "why do you ask such questions of me, poor wretched girl that I am, who know nothing except that I must pray and resign myself to my fate?"

"Why do I ask you that question, Babette? You remember what sentiments with regard to France and the French nation were instilled into us by our father. We have never looked upon the English as our fellow-countrymen, but as oppressors; and three months since, no music would have sounded more sweetly in my ears than that which fills them at this moment."

"Ah!" cried Jean, "to me it still sounds like the voice of my country calling me."

"Jean," rejoined Pierre, "the fatherland is nothing more than home on a grand scale; it is an enlargement of the family, an extension of the ties of blood. Ought we to sacrifice to it the lesser ties, the lesser family, the lesser home?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Pierre, what do you mean?" asked Babette.

"I mean this," Pierre replied: "in the rough plebeian work-stained hands of your brother, Babette, the fate of the city of Calais rests at this moment in all probability. Yes, these poor hands, blackened by my daily toil, have it in their power to deliver the key of France to her king."

"And can they hesitate?" cried Babette, who had imbibed with her mother's milk bitter hatred of the foreign yoke.

"Ah, my noble girl," said Jean, "truly you are deserving of our confidence!"

"Neither my heart nor my hands would hesitate for one moment," Pierre rejoined, "if I had it in my power to restore this fair city to King Henri's own hands, or to his representative, Monsieur le Duc de Guise. But the circumstances are such that we shall be compelled to use Monsieur d'Exmès as intermediary."

"Well, why not?" asked Babette, amazed at receiving such a reason for hesitation.

"Well," said Pierre, "however proud and happy I might be to be associated in so grand an achievement with him who was once our guest, it would be quite as distasteful to me to share the honor with a gentleman lacking bowels of compassion, who has helped to tarnish the honor of our name."

"What! you don't mean Monsieur d'Exmès, who is so kind-hearted and so loyal?"

"It is nevertheless true," said Pierre, "that your confidence in Monsieur d'Exmès, and Martin-Guerre's lack of conscience, have brought about your ruin; and yet you see that they both keep silent."

"But what *could* Monsieur d'Exmès do or say?" asked Babette.

"He could have sent Martin-Guerre here as soon as he returned to Paris, my sister, and have ordered him to bestow his name upon you! He could have sent his squire here instead of that stranger, and thus have paid the debt due your heart and the money owed to me at the same time."

"No, no; he could not have done that," said honest Babette, sadly shaking her head.

"What! he was not at liberty to give an order to his own servant?"

"What good would have been done by that order?" said Babette.

"What good?" cried Pierre. "Is there no good in atoning for a crime, or in saving a fair name from shame? Are you losing your wits, Babette?"

"Alas! no, unfortunately!" said the poor girl, weeping bitterly. "Those who lose their wits forget."

"Well, then," continued Pierre, "how, if you are in full possession of your reason, can you say that Monsieur d'Exmès has done right in not using his authority to compel your seducer to marry you?"

"To marry me! to marry me! Oh, how could he do so?" said Babette, in despair.

"What is to prevent him, pray?" exclaimed Jean and Pierre, with one voice.

Both had risen by an irresistible impulse. Babette fell upon her knees.

"Oh," she cried in her despair, "forgive me once more, dear brother! I wanted to conceal it from you. I concealed it even from my own heart! But now that you speak of our blighted honor, of France, and Monsieur d'Exmès, and unworthy Martin-Guerre, what can I do? Oh, my brain is in a whirl! You ask me if I am losing my wits. Truly I believe that I am. Come, you, who are calmer than I, tell me if I am mistaken, tell me if I was dreaming, or if what Monsieur d'Exmès told me was really true!"

"What Monsieur d'Exmès told you!" echoed Pierre, in alarm.

"Yes, in his room, the day of his departure, when I asked him to return the ring to Martin. I did not dare confess my fault to him, being a stranger. And yet he ought to have understood me; and if he did understand, how could he have told me?"

"What — what did he tell you? Go on!" cried Pierre.

"Alas! that Martin-Guerre was already married!" said Babette.

"Miserable wretch!" ejaculated Pierre Peuquoy, beside himself, and springing at his sister with uplifted hand.

"Ah! it is true, then!" said the poor child, in a faint voice; "I feel now that it is true."

She fell fainting upon the floor.

Jean had had time to seize Pierre around the waist and hold him back.

"What are you doing, Pierre?" said he, sternly. "It is not the unfortunate victim that you should strike, but the villain who caused her ruin."

"You are right," Pierre responded, already ashamed of his blind rage.

He stepped apart, stern and gloomy, while Jean, leaning over Babette, tried to resuscitate her. There was a long silence.

At last Babette opened her eyes, and seemed to be trying to remember.

"What has happened?" she asked.

She looked up with a wandering expression into the kind face of Jean Peuquoy bending over her.

Strangely enough, Jean seemed not to be very melancholy. There even was to be seen upon his pleasant face, mingled with deep pity, a sort of secret satisfaction.

"My good cousin!" said Babette, giving him her hand.

Jean Peuquoy's first words to the beloved sufferer were, —

"Don't give up hope, Babette; don't give up hope!"
But Babette's eyes fell at this moment upon the sombre

and desolate figure of her brother, and she gave a convulsive start, for everything came back to her memory at once.

"Oh, Pierre, forgive me!" she cried.

As Jean made him an appealing gesture to urge him to be pitiful, Pierre advanced to his sister, raised her from the floor, and led her to a seat.

"Don't be alarmed," said he. "I have no ill-will against you. You have suffered too much. Don't be alarmed. I will say to you as Jean did, don't give up hope."

"Ah, what have I to hope for now?" she said.

"No reparation, to be sure, but vengeance, at all events," Pierre replied, frowning.

"And I," whispered Jean, — "I say to you, vengeance and reparation at the same time."

She looked at him in amazement. But before she could question him, Pierre resumed, —

"Once more, my poor sister, I forgive you. Your fault is surely no greater because a cowardly villain has deceived you twice. I love you, Babette, as I have always loved you."

Babette, happy even in her grief, threw herself into her brother's arms.

"However," continued Pierre, when he had embraced her, "my anger is by no means burned out; it is only shifted to other shoulders than yours. I repeat, I would like now to have under my foot that villanous perjurer and scoundrel Martin-Guerre!"

"Dear brother!" Babette interposed piteously.

"No! no pity for him!" cried the stern burgher. "But I owe an apology to his master, Monsieur d'Exmès; frankly, I must admit that."

"I told you so, Pierre," rejoined Jean.

"Yes, Jean, you were right, as you always are, and I was very unjust to a loyal gentleman. Now everything is explained. Nay, more, his very silence shows his delicate tact. Why should he have cruelly reminded us of an irreparable misfortune? I was wrong! And to think that I was almost on the point of allowing myself, through a grievous mistake, to give the lie to all the convictions and instincts of my whole life, and to make my beloved country, which is so dear to my heart, pay the penalty for an offence which never existed!"

"On what slight contingencies do the great events of the world turn!" was Jean Peuquoy's philosophical comment. "However, no harm has been done," he added; "and thanks to what Babette has told us, we know now that Vicomte d'Exmès has done nothing to make him unworthy of our friendship. Oh, I knew his noble heart; for I have never seen aught in him that did not compel my admiration, except his first hesitation when we broached the subject of taking our revenge for the capture of St. Quentin. But that very hesitation, in my opinion, he is endeavoring at this very moment to make amends for in most brilliant fashion."

The brave weaver raised his hand to call their attention to the loud booming of the cannon, which seemed to sound nearer every moment.

"Jean," said Pierre, "do you know what that bombardment is saying to us?"

"It tells us that Monsieur d'Exmès is there," Jean replied.

"Yes; but," he added in his cousin's ear, "it also tells us to 'remember the 5th!'"

"And we will remember it, Pierre, will we not?"

These whispered confidences alarmed Babette, who, with her mind still engrossed with the one thought, murmured,—

"What are they plotting together? Holy Virgin! If Monsieur d'Exmès is there, may God grant that Martin-Guerre be not with him!"

"Martin-Guerre?" Jean rejoined, having overheard her. "Oh, Monsieur d'Exmès must have dismissed the miserable scamp in disgrace! And he will have done well, even from the blackguard's own standpoint; for we would have challenged him and slain him the moment he set foot in Calais, would we not, Pierre?"

"I shall do that in any case," the brother replied in a tone of inflexible determination; "if not at Calais, then at Paris! I certainly shall kill him!"

"Oh," cried Babette, "this retaliation is just what I dreaded! Not for him whom I no longer love, nay, whom I despise, but for you, Pierre, and you, Jean, both so fraternally kind and so devoted to me!"

"So, Babette," said Jean Peuquoy, with emotion, "in a contest between him and me, your prayers would be offered up for me and not for him?"

"Ah," Babette replied, "that one question, Jean, is the most cruel punishment for my fault that you could inflict upon me. How could I hesitate for one instant to-day between you, who are so kind and indulgent to me, and him, so treacherous and so vile?"

"Thanks!" cried Jean. "It does me good to have you say so to me, Babette, and be sure that God will reward you for it."

"For my own part," Pierre rejoined, "I am sure that God will punish the culprit. But let us think no more about him, my cousin," he said to Jean; "for we have much else to do now, and only three days in which to make our preparations. We must go about, notify our friends, get our arms together—"

In a low voice he said once more, —

"Jean, we must remember the 5th!"

A quarter of an hour later, while Babette, in the solitude of her own chamber, was offering her thanks to God, without a clear idea of her reasons for doing so, the armorer and weaver were going about the city, intent upon the business they had in hand.

They seemed to have forgotten Martin-Guerre, who at that moment, we may say in passing, was in utter ignorance of the warm reception which awaited him in the good city of Calais, where he had never before set foot.

Meanwhile the cannon were thundering away incessantly; as Rabutin says, "charging and discharging, with fury inconceivable, their tempest of artillery."

CHAPTER II.

WITHIN THE TENT.

THREE days after the scene we have just described, on the 4th of January, in the evening, the French, despite Lord Wentworth's confident predictions, had made a great advance.

They had passed not only the bridge of Nieullay, but also the fort of the same name, of which they had been in possession since the morning, as well as of all the arms and stores which it contained.

From that strong position they could effectually bar the way against any Spanish or English reinforcements coming by land.

Such important results were surely well worth the three days of furious and mortal combat which they had cost.

"Is this a dream?" cried the haughty governor of Calais, when he saw his troops fleeing in disorder toward the city, despite his brave struggle to induce them to return to their posts.

To put the finishing touch to his humiliation, he had to follow them; for his duty required him to be the last to withdraw.

"Fortunately," remarked Lord Derby to him when they were safely within the walls, — "fortunately, Calais and the Old Château will be able to hold out two or three days longer, even with the few troops still at our disposal. The Risbank fort and the harbor are still open, and England is not far away."

Lord Wentworth's council were unanimously of the opinion that their safety lay in that direction, and it was no longer time to heed the voice of pride. An express must be despatched at once to Dover. On the following day, at the latest, strong reinforcements would arrive, and Calais would be saved.

Lord Wentworth realized the situation, and decided to adopt this course. A vessel set sail at once, carrying an urgent message to the governor of Dover.

Then the council took measures to concentrate all their energies upon the defence of the Old Château, which was the vulnerable side of Calais, inasmuch as the sea, the sand-dunes, and a handful of the civic guard would be more than sufficient to protect the Risbank fort.

While the besieged were thus preparing to make a brave resistance at the probable points of attack, let us glance for a moment at the camp of the besieging army outside the city, and see particularly how Vicomte d'Exmès, Martin-Guerre, and their gallant recruits were employing themselves on this evening of January 4.

Being soldiers, not sappers and miners, and having no duties in connection with the digging of trenches or siege works, but serving only when there was fighting to be done or an assault to be made, they were now taking their well-earned rest. We need only draw aside the door of a tent pitched a little apart on the right of the camp to find Gabriel and his troop of volunteers. The tableau thus presented to view was picturesque and varied.

Gabriel, with bowed head, was sitting in a corner upon the only stool which the establishment could boast, apparently plunged in profound abstraction.

At his feet Martin-Guerre was fitting the buckle of a sword-belt. He looked anxiously at his master from time

to time, but did not presume to interrupt the silent meditation in which he was absorbed.

Not far from them, on a sort of couch made of cloaks, a wounded man lay moaning. Alas ! the sufferer was no other than the ill-fated Malemort.

At the other end of the tent the pious Lactance was telling his beads with great animation and fervency. Lactance had been unfortunate enough at the storming of Fort Nieulay that morning to knock on the head three of his brothers in Jesus Christ ; for that he owed his conscience three hundred *Paters* and as many *Aves*. That was the ordinary penance which his confessor had laid upon him for those he killed ; wounded men counted only for half.

Near him, Yvonnet, after having carefully cleaned and brushed his clothes, which were stained with mud and powder, was looking about to find some corner where the ground was not too damp, so that he might stretch himself and take a little rest, for the prolonged watching and toil were not well suited to his delicate constitution.

Two paces from Yvonnet, the two Scharfensteins, uncle and nephew, were making complicated calculations on their enormous fingers. They were figuring out the probable value of their morning's booty. The nephew had been fortunate enough to lay his hand upon a valuable suit of armor ; and the worthy Teutons, with beaming countenances, were dividing in advance the money which they expected to receive for their rich prize.

The veterans, in a group in the centre of the tent, were playing at dice ; and the players and bystanders alike were following with much interest the varying chances of the game.

A huge smoking torch fixed in the earth lighted up the pleased or disappointed faces, and cast an uncertain,

flickering light upon the features of the others, with their contrasted expressions, which we have tried to describe and sketch in the half-darkness.

Gabriel raised his head, as poor Malemort uttered a more dolorous groan than usual, and said to his squire, —

“Martin-Guerre, what time is it now?”

“Monseigneur, I can’t tell very accurately,” Martin replied, “for this stormy night has put out all the stars; but I imagine that it is not far from six o’clock, for it has been dark more than an hour.”

“The surgeon promised to come at six o’clock, did he not?”

“At six precisely, Monseigneur. See, some one raises the curtain; yes, there he is.”

Vicomte d’Exmès cast his eyes upon the new arrival, and recognized him at the first glance. He had seen him but once before; but the surgeon’s face was one of those which when once seen are never forgotten.

“Master Ambroise Paré!” cried Gabriel, rising.

“Monsieur le Vicomte d’Exmès!” said Paré, with a low bow.

“Ah, Master, I had no idea you were in camp, and so near us!” said Gabriel.

“I try always to be where I can be of the most service,” the surgeon responded.

“Oh, I recognize your noble heart in that! and I am doubly glad that you are here to-day, for I need to avail myself of your knowledge and skill.”

“Not for yourself, I trust,” said Ambroise Paré. “Of whom do you speak?”

“It is one of my people,” said Gabriel. “This morning, while charging in a sort of frenzy upon the retreating English, he received a lance-thrust in the shoulder from one of them.”

"In the shoulder? It may not be a very serious matter, then," said the surgeon.

"I am afraid it is, however," said Gabriel, in a lower tone; "for one of the wounded man's comrades, Scharfenstein there, tried in such a rough and awkward fashion to pull out the lance-head that he broke it off, and the iron remained in the wound."

Ambroise Paré's face for a moment assumed an expression which augured ill for the sufferer.

"Let me see him," he said, with his accustomed calmness.

He was conducted to the patient's bed. All the veterans had risen and surrounded the surgeon, each one abandoning his game or his reckoning or whatever he was engaged in. Lactance alone continued to mumble his beads in his corner; for when doing penance for his doughty deeds he never allowed himself to be interrupted except to perform others.

Ambroise Paré removed the bandages in which Malemort's shoulder was enveloped, and examined the wound very carefully. He shook his head doubtfully, as if in dissatisfaction, but said aloud, —

"This is nothing."

"Ho, ho!" grumbled Malemort. "If it is nothing, can I go and fight again to-morrow?"

"I don't think so," said Ambroise Paré, probing the wound.

"Ah! you hurt me a bit, did you know it?" said Malemort.

"Yes, I suppose I do," was the surgeon's reply; "but courage, my friend!"

"Oh, I am brave enough," said Malemort. "After all, this has been tolerable so far. "Will it be much worse when you have to extract that infernal piece of iron?"

"No, for here it is," said Ambroise Paré, triumphant, holding up, so that Malemort could see, the lance-head he had succeeded in removing.

"I am very much obliged, Monsieur le Chirurgien," said Malemort, courteously.

A murmur of admiring wonder welcomed the masterly skill of Ambroise Paré.

"What! is it all over?" said Gabriel. "Why, it's perfectly marvellous."

"We must agree too," rejoined Ambroise, smiling, "that the wounded man was not afraid of pain."

"Nor the operator unskilful, by the Mass!" cried a new-comer behind the soldiers, whose entrance nobody had noticed amid the general anxiety.

But at the well-known voice all stood aside respectfully.

"Monsieur le Duc de Guise!" said Paré, recognizing the features of the commander-in-chief.

"Yes, Master," rejoined the new-comer, "Monsieur de Guise; and I am amazed and delighted with your superb skill. By my patron, Saint François, I have just been watching at the hospital some downright blockheads of doctors, who have done more harm to our soldiers with their instruments, I swear, than the English with their weapons. But you extracted this iron stake, upon my word, as easily and gently as if it had been a gray hair. And I do not know you! What is your name, Master?"

"Ambroise Paré, Monseigneur," said the surgeon.

"Well, Master Ambroise Paré," said the duke, "I promise you that your fortune is made, — on one condition, however."

"And may I know what the condition is, Monseigneur?"

"That if I get wounded or bruised, which is very

possible, especially in these days, you will take charge of me and treat me with as little ceremony as you showed this poor devil."

"Monseigneur, I will do it," said Ambroise, bowing. "All men are equal in suffering."

"Hum!" rejoined François de Lorraine, "you will try, in the case I have mentioned to you, that they may be equal also in the matter of being cured."

"Will Monseigneur permit me now," said the surgeon, "to close and bandage this man's wound? There are many other wounded men who are in need of my services to-day."

"Do so, Master Ambroise Paré," the duke replied. "Go on without paying any more heed to me. I am in haste to see you on your way to deliver as many patients as possible from the hands of our cursed bunglers. Besides, I must speak with Monsieur d'Exmès."

Ambroise Paré at once set about dressing Malemort's wound.

"Monsieur le Chirurgien, I thank you again," said the patient; "but if you will excuse me, I have still another favor to ask of you."

"What is that, my fine fellow?" asked Ambroise.

"Well, it's like this, Monsieur le Chirurgien," said Malemort. "Now that I can no longer feel that horrible stump in my flesh, it seems to me as if I were almost well."

"Yes, almost," said Ambroise, pressing the ligatures together.

"Well, then," said Malemort, in a modest but unembarrassed tone, "will you be kind enough to say to my master, Monsieur d'Exmès, that if there is any fighting to-morrow, I am in perfectly fit condition to take part in it?"

"You fight to-morrow!" cried Ambroise Paré. "Ah! you must not think of it!"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, but I can't help thinking of it," rejoined Malemort, sadly.

"My poor fellow," said the surgeon, "just remember that I order a week of perfect rest, — at least a week in bed, and a week of light diet!"

"Light diet, so far as food is concerned, if you please," said Malemort, "but not abstinence from battle, I beg you."

"You are insane!" resumed Ambroise Paré; "if you but raise your head, the fever will seize you, and you will be a dead man. I said a week, and I will not take off an hour."

"Oh!" roared Malemort, "in a week the siege will be at an end. I shall never get my fill of fighting."

"What a blood-thirsty fellow he is!" said the Duc de Guise, who had been listening to this singular dialogue.

"That is Malemort all over," said Gabriel, smiling; "and I beg you, Monseigneur, to give orders to have him taken to the hospital, and carefully watched there; for if he hears the noise of a *mêlée*, he is quite capable of trying to get out of bed, in spite of everything."

"Oh, well, that's a very simple matter," said the Duc de Guise. "Give orders yourself to his comrades to carry him there."

"But, Monseigneur," Gabriel rejoined with some embarrassment, "it is quite possible that I shall have work for my brave fellows to do to-night."

"Oho!" said the duke, looking in surprise at Vicomte d'Exmès.

"If Monsieur d'Exmès wishes," said Ambroise Paré, who had drawn near them after he had dressed the wound, "I will send two of my assistants with a litter to take this wounded fire-eater away."

"I am very much obliged to you, and gladly accept your offer ; I commend him to your most watchful care," said Gabriel.

Malemort gave vent to another despairing roar.

Ambroise Paré withdrew, having taken leave of the Duc de Guise. At a sign from Martin-Guerre, all but Monsieur d'Exmès retired to the farther end of the tent, and Gabriel was left tête-a-tête with the general directing the siege.

CHAPTER III.

SMALL CRAFT SOMETIMES SAVE LARGE MEN-OF-WAR.

WHEN Vicomte d'Exmès was left alone with the Duc de Guise, he began the conversation thus, —

“Well, Monseigneur, are you content?”

“Yes, my friend,” François de Lorraine replied, — “yes, I am content with the results so far attained, but I confess I am very anxious as to the future. It was this anxiety which drove me out of my tent to-night to wander about the camp, and come to you for encouragement and advice.”

“But what is there new?” asked Gabriel. “I should imagine that the result so far has surpassed all your anticipations, has it not? In four days you have made yourself master of two of the outworks of Calais; besides, the defenders of the city itself and the Old Château cannot hold out more than forty-eight hours longer.”

“Very true,” said the duke; “but they can hold out that length of time, and that will be quite long enough to foil all our plans, and save themselves.”

“Oh, Monseigneur must allow me to express my doubts of that,” said Gabriel.

“No, my friend, my long experience does not mislead me,” rejoined the Duc de Guise; “except for some unexpected piece of good fortune, or some occurrence beyond human foresight, our undertaking has failed. Believe me when I say this.”

"But why?" asked Gabriel, with a smile, which contrasted strangely with the gloomy prognostications of the duke.

"I will tell you in two words, upon the basis of your own plan. Listen carefully to what I say."

"I am all attention," said Gabriel.

"The extraordinarily hazardous experiment into which your youthful enthusiasm seduced my more cautious ambition," continued the duke, "had no possible chance of success except in the isolation and complete surprise of the English garrison. Calais was impregnable, we were agreed, but might be taken by surprise. We reasoned out our insane enterprise along that line, did we not?"

"And up to the present moment," was Gabriel's reply, "the facts have borne us out in our reasoning."

"They have indeed," said the duke; "and you have demonstrated, Gabriel, that your judgment of men is as keen and far-seeing as your perception of facts; and that you had studied the disposition and character of the governor of Calais as carefully as the interior plan of his seat of government. Lord Wentworth has not belied a single one of your conjectures. He believed that his nine hundred men and his formidable outposts would suffice to make us repent of our reckless freak. He despised us too much to be alarmed, and did not deign to call a single company to his assistance, either from any other part of the continent or from England."

"I did indeed succeed in conjecturing how his arrogant pride would comport itself under such circumstances."

"Thanks to his overweening self-conceit," resumed the Duc de Guise, "we carried Fort Ste. Agathe almost without striking a blow, and the Nieulay fort after three days of successful fighting."

"So that at this moment," said Gabriel, cheerfully,

"any bodies of English or Spaniards, coming by land to the rescue of their countrymen or their allies, will find the batteries of the Duc de Guise ready to exterminate them, instead of Lord Wentworth's cannon to second their assault."

"They will be on their guard, and will not approach very near," said the duke, smiling; for the young man's buoyant hopefulness was beginning to infect him.

"Well, then, have we not gained an important point?" said Gabriel.

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the duke; "but unfortunately it is not all, nor is it even the most important part. We have closed one of the roads by which outside reinforcements might enter Calais, and one of the gates of the city. But another gate and another road are still open."

"What one, pray, Monseigneur?" asked Gabriel, pretending to be in doubt.

"Cast your eye upon this map, drawn by Maréchal Strozzi, from the plan you furnished him," said the commander-in-chief. "Calais may be relieved at these two opposite points, — by the Nieulley fort, which covers the approaches on the landward side —"

"But which covers them for our benefit now," Gabriel interrupted.

"Very true," rejoined the duke; "but here on the ocean side, protected by the sea itself, by the marshes and sand-dunes, is the Risbank fort, do you see? — or if you choose to call it so, the Octagonal Tower, — a fort which commands the whole harbor, and makes it impossible for attacking vessels to enter. Let an express be sent to Dover, and in a few hours the English ships will transport hither enough troops and supplies to enable the place to hold out for years. Thus the Ris-

bank fort protects the city, and the sea protects the Risbank fort. Now, Gabriel, do you know what Lord Wentworth has done since his last misfortune?"

"Perfectly well," rejoined Vicomte d'Exmès, calmly. "Lord Wentworth, acting upon the unanimous opinion of his council, has sent an express in hot haste to Dover, to make up for his culpable delay, and expects to receive by this time to-morrow the reinforcements of which he has at last admitted the need."

"Well, you have not finished?" said Monsieur de Guise.

"I confess, Monseigneur, that I cannot look ahead much further," replied Gabriel. "I have not the prescience of God."

"No more than human prescience is needed here," said François de Lorraine; "but since yours stops halfway, I will finish for you."

"I should be glad if Monseigneur would condescend to tell me what will ensue, in his opinion," said Gabriel, bowing respectfully.

"It is very simple," said Monsieur de Guise. "The besieged, reinforced, if need be, by all England, will be enabled after to-morrow to face us at the Old Château with a superior force, if not an absolutely invincible one. If, notwithstanding, we still maintain our position, every Spaniard and Englishman in France will come down upon us here in the suburbs of Calais like the winter's snow from Ardres and Ham and St. Quentin; and when they decide that their numbers are sufficient, they will take their turn at besieging us. I agree that they will not be able to take the Nieullay fort without some difficulty; but they will easily repossess themselves of Fort Ste. Agathe, and then they will have us at their mercy between two fires."

"Such a catastrophe would indeed be terrible," said Gabriel, coolly.

"Yet it is only too likely to happen," rejoined the duke, passing his hand despondently over his brow.

"But surely, Monseigneur," said Gabriel, "you have not failed to consider the means of preventing such a disaster?"

"I am thinking of nothing else, upon my soul!" said the Duc de Guise.

"Well?" asked Gabriel, carelessly.

"Well, our only chance, — and a very precarious and hopeless chance it is, alas! — is, in my opinion, to make a desperate assault upon the Old Château to-morrow, under any circumstances. Nothing will be in readiness, I am aware, even though we were to pass the whole night in most assiduous and unremitting labor. But there is no other course for us to take; and it is less foolhardy than it would be for us to await the arrival of reinforcements from England. The 'French fury,' as they call it in Italy, may possibly succeed, by dint of its extraordinary impetuosity, in storming these inaccessible walls."

"No, it will be helplessly shattered against them," rejoined Gabriel, coldly. "Pardon me, Monseigneur, but it seems to me that at this moment the French army is neither sufficiently strong nor sufficiently weak thus to attempt the impossible. A fearful responsibility rests upon you, Monseigneur. It is probable that we should be finally beaten back after we had lost half of our force. What does the Duc de Guise mean to do in that event?"

"Not to expose himself to total ruin, to a complete overthrow, at all events," said François de Lorraine, gloomily; "but to withdraw from before these cursed

walls with such troops as I have left, and save them until better days dawn for our king and country."

"What, the victor of Metz and Renty retreat!" cried Gabriel.

"That is certainly much better than not knowing when one is beaten, as was the case with the constable on the day of St. Laurent," said the Duc de Guise.

"And yet," continued Gabriel, "it would be a disastrous blow to the glory of France, as well as to Monseigneur's reputation."

"Alas! who knows that so well as I?" exclaimed the duke. "See upon what slender threads depend success and fortune! If I had succeeded, I should have been a hero, a transcendent genius, a demigod; I fail, and I shall be henceforth only a vain and presumptuous fool, who well deserved the disgrace of his fall. The self-same undertaking which would have been called magnificent and marvellous, had it turned out happily, will draw upon me the ridicule of all Europe, and postpone if it does not destroy in the germ all my plans and hopes. To what do the paltry ambitions of this world lead!"

The duke ceased to speak, apparently a prey to bitter chagrin. There was a long silence, which Gabriel was very careful not to break.

He desired to give Monsieur de Guise ample opportunity to gauge the terrible difficulties of the crisis with his experienced eye.

When he considered that the duke must have probed them to the bottom, he said,—

"I see, Monseigneur, that you are at present involved in one of those periods of doubt and anxiety which come to the greatest of men in the midst of their greatest works. One word, however: Surely no such lofty genius, no such consummate general, as he to whom I have the

honor of speaking, could have lightly engaged in so momentous an enterprise as this, unless the smallest details, the most unlikely contingencies, had all been discussed at the Louvre. You must have worked out in advance favorable results for all possible sudden changes of fortune, and remedies for all possible ills. How does it happen, then, that you are hesitating and seeking anew for them now?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said the Duc de Guise, "your youthful enthusiasm and confidence fascinated and blinded me, I believe, Gabriel."

"Monseigneur!" said Gabriel, reproachfully.

"Oh, don't feel wounded, I beg, for I bear you no ill-will for it, my friend! I still admire your design, which was both a grand and a patriotic one. But stern reality is very fond of destroying our fairest dreams. Nevertheless, I remember distinctly that I laid before you certain objections, founded upon the possibility of this very extremity to which we are now reduced, and that you removed my scruples."

"And how, Monseigneur, please?"

"You promised me," said the Duc de Guise, "that if we succeeded in a few days in gaining possession of the two forts of Ste. Agathe and Nieullay, the secret arrangement that you had with persons in the town would place the Risbank fort in our hands, and thus Calais might be shut off from all hope of reinforcement by sea or land. Yes, Gabriel, I remember, and you must remember yourself, that you gave me that assurance."

"Very well!" said Gabriel, without the least symptom of anxiety or embarrassment.

"Well," rejoined the duke, "your hopes deceived you, did they not? Your friends in Calais have failed to keep their word, as was to be expected. They are evidently

not yet certain of our success, and are timid ; consequently they will not show themselves until it is too late to do us any good."

"Pardon me, Monseigneur, but who told you that?" asked Gabriel.

"Why, your very silence, my dear fellow. The time has come when our secret allies ought to come to our assistance, in which event they might perhaps save us. They give no sign, and your lips are sealed ; therefore I conclude that you no longer rely upon them, and that we must renounce all hope of succor from that quarter."

"If you knew me better, Monseigneur," was Gabriel's response, "you would know that I never like to talk when I can act."

"What's that? Do you still have hopes?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"Yes, Monseigneur, since I am still living," Gabriel replied, in a grave and melancholy tone.

"And the Risbank fort?"

"Shall be in your hands when necessary, unless I am dead."

"But, Gabriel, it will be necessary to-morrow, — to-morrow morning!"

"Then we shall have it to-morrow morning!" replied Gabriel, calmly, — "that is, I say again, unless I fall ; but in that event you cannot reproach one who has given his life in the attempt for his failure to keep his word."

"Gabriel," said the Duc de Guise, "what is it that you have in mind to do? Is it to face some mortal peril or to hazard some insane chance? I do not wish it; I do not wish it! France is only too much in need of such men as you."

"Be not at all alarmed, Monseigneur," rejoined Gabriel. "Though the danger be great, the end to be attained is

even greater, and the enterprise is well worth the risk which attends it. You need only think how to profit by the result, and leave the means to me. I am only responsible for myself; but you are responsible for every man in the army."

"At least tell me what I can do to second your plan?" said the duke. "What part have you assigned to me?"

"Monseigneur," Gabriel replied, "if you had not done me the honor to come to my tent this evening, it was my intention to seek you in your own quarters, and to make a request."

"Go on, — speak!" said the duke, earnestly.

"To-morrow, the 5th of the month, at daybreak, Monseigneur, — that is to say, about eight o'clock, the nights being very long in January, — I ask you to station a look-out with keen sight on the promontory from which the Risbank fort can be seen. If the English flag is still waving there at that time, take the chances of the desperate assault you have resolved upon, for I shall have failed; in other words, I shall be dead."

"Dead!" cried the duke. "You see, Gabriel, that you are fearing your own destruction."

"In that event, waste no time in vain regrets for me, Monseigneur," said the youth; "only let everything be in readiness, and devote all your energy to your last effort; and I pray God to give you means of success! Let every man share in the attack! The reinforcements from England cannot possibly arrive before noon; therefore you will have four hours of heroism before you in which to prove, ere you beat the retreat, that the French are as fearless as they are prudent."

"But, Gabriel, assure me again that you have some chance of success."

"Yes, indeed I have; be sure of that, Monseigneur. Therefore wait calmly and patiently, like the strong man that you are. Do not give the word too quickly for a headlong assault; I beg of you not to stake all upon that cast until it is actually necessary. Last of all, you need only keep Maréchal Strozzi and the miners quietly at work on the siege lines; and let your soldiers and artillerymen await the favorable moment for an assault, if at eight o'clock you are informed that the standard of France is flying over the Risbank fort."

"The standard of France over the Risbank fort!" cried the duke.

"A glance at it in such position," rejoined Gabriel, "will cause the ships on their way from England to retrace their steps without loss of time."

"I agree with you there," said Monsieur de Guise. "But, my dear friend, how will you do it?"

"Let me keep my secret, I implore you, Monseigneur," said Gabriel. "If you knew my extraordinary design, you might perhaps try to dissuade me from it. But it is no longer time to reflect and hesitate. Moreover, in all this I neither compromise the army nor yourself. These men here, the only ones whom I propose to employ, are all my own volunteers, and you agreed to leave me free to do as I would with them. I propose to accomplish my purpose unaided, or to die in the attempt."

"But why this pride?" asked the duke.

"It is not pride, Monseigneur; but I wish to requite as well as I can the priceless favor which you were good enough to promise me at Paris, and which I trust you remember."

"What priceless favor are you talking about, Gabriel?" said the duke. "I am supposed to have a good memory, especially where my friends are concerned; but I

am ashamed to confess that in this instance I do not remember."

"Alas! Monseigneur," Gabriel rejoined, "it is a very important matter for me, however! This is what I asked of you: if it should be proved to your satisfaction that in the execution as well as the conception of the project, the taking of Calais was due to me, and to me alone, I begged you not to give me the credit in public, for that credit would belong to you, as leader of the expedition, but simply to announce to King Henri II. the share which I had had under your orders in the conquest. You then graciously allowed me to hope that that reward would be accorded me."

"What! Is that the invaluable favor to which you allude, Gabriel?" asked the duke. "The deuce take me if I thought of that! But, my dear fellow, that will be no reward whatever, but a simple act of justice; and in secret or in public, as you choose, I shall be ever ready and willing to recognize and bear witness as I ought to your services and your deserts."

"My ambition does not go beyond what I have asked, Monseigneur," said Gabriel. "If the king be informed of my efforts, he has it in his power to bestow upon me a reward which would be worth more to me than all the honor and good fortune in the world."

"The king shall know all that you may have done for him, Gabriel. But can I do nothing more for you?"

"Indeed, Monseigneur, I have one or two other demands to make upon your good-will."

"Tell me," said the duke.

"In the first place," said Gabriel, "I must have the countersign, so that I may be able to leave camp with my people at any hour of the night I choose."

"You have only to say 'Calais and Charles,' and the sentinels will allow you to pass."

"Then, Monseigneur," said Gabriel, "if I fall, and your assault succeeds, I venture to remind you that Madame Diane de Castro, the king's daughter, is Lord Wentworth's prisoner, and has an indisputable claim upon your courteous protection." •

"I will remember my duty as a man and a gentleman," rejoined the duke. "And then?"

"Lastly, Monseigneur, I am about to contract to-night a considerable debt to a fisherman of this coast, named Anselme. If Anselme dies with me, I have written to Master Elyot, who has charge of my property, to provide for the maintenance and well-being of his family, deprived as they will be of his support. But for greater security, Monseigneur, I would be deeply obliged if you would see that my orders are executed."

"It shall be done," said the duke. "Is that all?"

"It is, Monseigneur," Gabriel replied. "But if you never see me again, think of me sometimes, I beg, with a little regret, and speak of me as one for whom you had some esteem, whether it be to the king, who will surely be glad to hear of my death, or to Madame de Castro, who may perhaps be grieved. Now I will detain you no longer, but will bid you farewell, Monseigneur."

The Duc de Guise rose to go.

"Pray banish your gloomy thoughts, my friend," said he. "I leave you, so that you may be perfectly free to go on with your mysterious project; but I confess that until eight o'clock to-morrow, I shall be very anxious and shall find it hard to sleep. But it will be principally because of the obscurity which hides your operations from me. Something tells me that I shall see you again; therefore I will not say adieu."

"Thanks for the augury, Monseigneur," said Gabriel ;
"for if you see me again, it will be in Calais when it shall
have become a French city."

"And in that event," said the duke, "you can fairly
boast of having rescued the honor of France, and mine as
well, from bitter peril."

"Small craft, Monseigneur, sometimes save large men-
of-war," said Gabriel, bowing.

The Duc de Guise, at the door of the tent, gave
Gabriel's hand a cordial grasp, and withdrew in deep
thought to his headquarters.

CHAPTER IV.

OBSCURI SOLA SUB NOCTE.

WHEN Gabriel returned to his seat after escorting Monsieur de Guise to the door, he made a sign to Martin-Guerre, who at once left his occupation and went out, seeming to need no further instructions.

The squire came back after about fifteen minutes, accompanied by a pale, emaciated individual, whose clothes were almost falling from his body.

Martin approached his master, who was again absorbed in thought. The other occupants of the tent were playing or sleeping, as their fancy dictated.

"Monseigneur," said Martin-Guerre, "this is our man."

"Oh, yes!" said Gabriel; "so you are Anselme the fisherman, of whom Martin-Guerre has spoken to me?" he added, turning to the new-comer.

"Yes, Monseigneur, I am Anselme the fisherman," was the reply.

"Do you know the service in which we desire your aid?" asked Vicomte d'Exmès.

"Your squire has told me, Monseigneur; and I am ready."

"Martin-Guerre ought also to have told you," continued Gabriel, "that in this expedition your life will be in danger as will our own."

"Oh," rejoined the fisherman, "he had no need to tell me that; for I knew it as well as he, or even better."

"And still you came?" said Gabriel.

"Here I am, at your service," Anselme replied.

"Very good, my friend; it is the deed of a noble heart."

"Or of a hopeless existence," was the response.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Gabriel.

"Why, by our Lady!" said Anselme. "Every day I take my life in my hand for the sake of bringing home a few fish, and very often I come home empty-handed. So there is very little merit in risking my tanned skin for you to-day, when you promise, whether I live or die, to care for the future welfare of my wife and my three children."

"Very true," said Gabriel; "but the danger that you face every day is uncertain, and hidden from you in a measure. You never go to sea during a gale. But this time the risk is perceptible and unmistakable."

"Indeed," replied the fisherman, "it is perfectly certain that one must be a madman or a saint, to venture upon the water on such a night as this. But that is your affair; and it is not for me to find fault, if you choose to do it. You have paid me in advance for my boat and my body. But you will owe the Holy Virgin a fine candle of pure wax if we arrive safe and sound."

"Even when we have arrived, Anselme," Gabriel resumed, "your labors are not at an end. Having rowed us safely across, you will be called upon to fight, and do a soldier's work after having done duty as a sailor. Don't forget that you are about to incur dangers of two sorts."

"It's all right," said Anselme; "but don't be too discouraging in what you say. Your orders shall be obeyed. You guarantee the lives of those who are dear to me, and I give you mine. The bargain is struck, and let us say no more about it."

"You are a brave fellow!" said Gabriel. "As to your wife and children, let your mind be quite easy; for they shall want for nothing. I have written to my agent Elyot my wishes on that point; and Monsieur le Duc de Guise will himself see that they are carried out."

"That is more than you were called upon to do," said the fisherman; "and you are more generous than a king. I will play no tricks with you. You need only have given me sufficient money to relieve me from embarrassment during these hard times, and I would have expected nothing further. But if I am satisfied with you, I hope that you will not be disappointed in me."

"Let us see," said Gabriel; "will your boat hold fourteen?"

"She has held twenty, Monseigneur."

"You will need strong arms to help you row, will you not?"

"Yes, indeed," said Anselme; "for I shall have my hands full with the helm and the sail, if we can carry sail."

"We have three men," said Martin-Guerre, — "Ambrosio, Pilletrousse, and Landry, — who can row as if they had never done anything else in their lives, and I myself can swim with a pair of oars as easily as with my arms."

"Well, well," said Anselme, joyously, "I shall quite have the appearance of a smart sea-captain with so many fine fellows in my crew! There is one point on which Master Martin has thus far left me in ignorance, and that is the precise spot where we are to land."

"The Risbank fort," Gabriel replied.

"The Risbank fort! Did you say the Risbank fort?" cried the stupefied fisherman.

"Certainly I did," said Gabriel; "what objection have you to offer to that?"

"Oh, nothing," rejoined Anselme, "except that it is hardly possible to land at that point, and that I personally have never cast anchor there. It's nothing but rocks."

"Do you refuse to guide us?" asked Gabriel.

"My faith! no; I will do my best, though I am but little acquainted with that part of the coast. My father, who like myself was born a fisherman, used to say: 'We must not try to lord it over fish or customers.' I will take you to the Risbank fort if I can. A nice little trip we shall have!"

"At what hour must we be ready to start?" asked Gabriel.

"You want to reach there at four, I believe?" returned Anselme.

"Between four and five; no later."

"Very well! from the point where we must embark so as not to be seen and arouse suspicion, we must reckon upon two hours of sailing; the most important thing is not to tire ourselves unnecessarily on the water. From here to the creek is about an hour's march."

"Then we should leave the camp about one hour after midnight?" said Gabriel.

"That will be about right," Anselme replied.

"Well, then, I will go and tell my men," said Gabriel.

"Do so, Monseigneur," said the fisherman. "I will ask your leave to lie down with them and sleep until one o'clock. I have said farewell at home; the boat is already carefully hidden and safely moored, so that I have nothing to call me away."

"You are quite right, Anselme," said Gabriel; "lie down for awhile, for you will have enough to tire you before this night is over. Martin-Guerre, you may tell your companions now."

"Ho, there, you fellows! You gamblers and sleepy heads!" cried Martin-Guerre.

"What is it? What's the matter?" they cried, rising and drawing near.

"Thank Monseigneur; for there is a special expedition on foot for one o'clock," said Martin.

"Good! very good! splendid!" was the hearty chorus of the veterans.

Even Malemort added his joyful shout to these unequivocal demonstrations of satisfaction.

But at that very moment four of Ambroise Paré's assistants appeared to carry the wounded man to the hospital.

Malemort was loud in his protestations.

But notwithstanding his cries and struggles, they put him upon a litter and held him there. In vain did he pour most bitter reproaches upon his comrades, even calling them deserters and traitors, since they were despicable enough to go into battle without him. No notice was taken of his epithets; and he was carried off cursing and swearing.

"Now," said Martin-Guerre, "we must make our final arrangements, and assign to every man the part he is to play and his position."

"What sort of job have we on hand?" asked Pilletrousse.

"Oh, a sort of assault," replied Martin.

"Then I will be the first one to scale the wall!" cried Yvonnet.

"Very well," said the squire.

"No, that is n't fair!" exclaimed Ambrosio. "Yvonnet always monopolizes the first place in times of danger. Really, it seems as if he thinks of nobody but himself."

"Let him have his way," said Gabriel, interposing.

"In the hazardous ascent that we are about to make, the foremost will be the least exposed, I imagine. As a proof of my belief, I propose myself to be the last to ascend."

"Then Yvonnet will be cheated," cried Ambrosio, laughing.

Martin-Guerre assigned to each man his place in the order of march, as well as his number in the boat and in the assault. Ambrosio, Pilletrousse, and Landry were notified that they would have to row. In fact, everything that could be was arranged beforehand, so as to avoid confusion and misunderstanding as far as possible.

Lactance took Martin-Guerre aside for a moment.

"Pardon me," said he; "but do you imagine there is any killing to be done?"

"I am not sure; but it is very possible," Martin replied.

"Thanks," returned Lactance; "in that case I think I will say my prayers and do penance in advance for three or four dead men and as many wounded."

When everything was settled, Gabriel advised his men to obtain an hour or two of sleep. He undertook to awaken them himself when it was time.

"Yes, I shall be glad to get a little sleep," said Yvonnet; "for my poor nerves are terribly excited this evening, and I need above all things to be cool and fresh when I am fighting."

In a few moments not a sound was to be heard within the tent save the regular breathing of the veterans and the monotonous *Pater nosters* of Lactance.

Soon the last-mentioned noise also ceased, for drowsiness had at last overcome Lactance, and he too was asleep.

Gabriel alone was awake and deep in thought.

Toward one o'clock he awoke his men one by one. They all rose and equipped themselves in silence. Then they went softly from the tent and left the camp.

At the words, 'Calais and Charles,' uttered in a low voice by Gabriel, the sentinels allowed them to pass unquestioned.

The little band, under the guidance of Anselme the fisherman, took its way through the fields, along the shore. Not a word was uttered. Nothing was to be heard save the moaning of the wind, and the melancholy voice of the sea in the distance.

It was a dark and stormy night. Not a soul was to be seen along the road traversed by our adventurers. Even if they had met any one, it was more than probable that they would have passed unnoticed; but had they been seen, they would certainly have been mistaken for phantoms at that hour and in such darkness.

Within the city, there was also one man who at that hour was still awake.

It was Lord Wentworth, the governor, although, relying upon the reinforcements for which he had sent to Dover as being sure to arrive on the morrow, he had retired to his own house, hoping to obtain some rest.

He had not slept, in truth, for three days, exposing himself continually, it must be said, at the points of greatest danger with untiring gallantry, and was always to be found wherever his presence was required.

On the evening of January 4 he had paid a visit to the breach of the Old Château, had personally posted the sentinels, and had reviewed the civic militia, who were intrusted with the simple duty of defending the Risbank fort.

But notwithstanding his intense weariness, and although everything was secure and quiet, he could not sleep.

A vague dread, absurd but not to be driven away, kept his eyes wide open as he lay on his bed.

Yet all his precautions were well taken; the enemy could not possibly venture upon a night attack, relying upon so trifling a breach as that in the Old Château. As for the other points, they would protect themselves with the aid of the swamp and the ocean.

Lord Wentworth said all this to himself a thousand times, and yet he could not sleep.

He seemed to feel something floating in the night air about the city which told him of a terrible danger from an invisible foe.

In his disordered fancy that enemy was not Maréchal Strozzi, nor the Duc de Nevers; it was not even the great François de Guise.

What! Could it be that it was his former prisoner, whom his bitter enmity had enabled him to recognize several times in the distance from the summit of the fortifications? Was it really that madman, Vicomte d'Exmès, Madame de Castro's lover?

What a ridiculous adversary for the governor of Calais in his strong city, still so impregvably guarded!

However, Lord Wentworth, whatever the reason may have been, could neither overcome this indefinable dread nor explain it.

But he felt its presence, and he could not sleep.

CHAPTER V.

BETWEEN TWO CHASMS.

THE Risbank fort, which on account of its eight faces was also called the Octagonal Tower, was built, as we have said, at the entrance of Calais Harbor, in front of the sand-dunes ; and its black and frowning mass of granite towered aloft upon another mass, as forbidding and quite as colossal, of solid cliff.

The sea, when the tide was high, broke against the cliff, but never touched the lowest courses of the stone walls of the fort.

Now, the sea was running very high and very threateningly on the night of the 4th of January, 1558, and toward four o'clock in the morning of the 5th it gave forth that resounding but mournful moaning which makes it resemble an ever restless and despairing soul.

Suddenly, a short time after the sentinel who was stationed upon the platform of the tower from two o'clock to four had been relieved by him whose tour of duty ran from four to six, a sound like a human cry, as if uttered by lungs of brass, made itself distinctly heard amid the tempest, over the moaning of the sea.

Then the newly arrived sentry might have been seen to start, listen attentively, and lean his cross-bow against the wall, after he had made sure of the source of this strange sound. Next, when he had satisfied himself that no eye was upon him, he lifted, with a mighty arm, his sentry-box from the rock, and drew from beneath it a pile

of rope which assumed the shape of a long knotted ladder, which he securely fastened to the pieces of iron fixed in the battlements.

Finally he attached the various pieces of rope firmly together, and lowered them over the walls, when two heavy pieces of lead quickly carried the ends down upon the rock on which the fort was built.

The ladder was two hundred and twelve feet long, and the fort two hundred and fifteen feet high.

Scarcely had he completed his mysterious operation when the night patrol appeared at the top of the steps leading to the platform. As the sentinel was standing near his box, the patrol asked and received the countersign, and passed on without noticing anything out of the regular course.

The sentinel, much relieved in his mind, anxiously awaited what was to follow. It was already quarter past four.

At the foot of the cliff was a boat manned by fourteen men, who, after more than two hours of hard and almost superhuman labor, had succeeded in reaching the Risbank fort. A wooden ladder was placed against the cliff. It reached up to a sort of excavation in the rock, where five or six men might stand at once.

One by one, and in absolute silence, the bold adventurers mounted the ladder from the boat, and without stopping at the excavation, continued clambering up the cliff, using both their feet and hands, and taking advantage of every inequality in the face of the rock.

Their purpose was to reach the foot of the tower. But the darkness was intense, and the rock slippery; their fingers were torn and bleeding, and one of them lost his footing, and rolled helplessly down until he fell into the sea.

Luckily the last of the fourteen men was still in the boat, trying vainly to make her fast before trusting himself to the ladder.

The man who had fallen, and who had had the forethought and courage not to utter a cry as he fell, swam vigorously toward the boat. The other lent him a hand, and despite the pitching of the boat under his feet, had the satisfaction of rescuing him safe and sound.

"What! is it you, Martin-Guerre?" said he, thinking that he recognized him in the darkness.

"It is myself, I admit, Monseigneur," said the squire.

"How came you to slip, bungler?" asked Gabriel.

"It was much better that it should have happened to me than to another," said Martin.

"Why?"

"Because anybody else would have made an outcry," replied Martin.

"Well, since you are here," said Gabriel, "help me pass this rope around that great root. I very foolishly sent Anselme ahead with the others."

"The root will not hold, Monseigneur," said Martin; "the least shock will pull it up, and the boat will be destroyed and we shall be carried away with it."

"There is nothing else to be done," rejoined Gabriel; "so let us set about it without more ado."

When they had made the boat fast as well as they could, Gabriel said to his squire, —

"Come, up with you!"

"After you, Monseigneur; otherwise who will hold the ladder?"

"Go up, I tell you!" repeated Gabriel, stamping his foot impatiently.

The time was not propitious for argument or formality. Martin-Guerre mounted as far as the excavation in the

cliff, and from that elevation held the uprights of the ladder with all his strength while Gabriel ascended in his turn.

His foot was on the topmost round when a powerful wave struck the boat, broke the rope, and carried ladder and skiff out to sea.

Gabriel would have been lost save for Martin, who, at the risk of dying with him, leaned over the abyss with a motion quicker than thought, and seized his master by the collar of his doublet; then, with all the energy of despair, the brave fellow drew Gabriel up to where he was standing on the rock, as unharmed as himself.

"Now you have saved my life, my gallant Martin," said Gabriel.

"Yes; but the boat has gone," returned the squire.

"Bah! As Anselme says, it is paid for," said Gabriel, with a carelessness assumed to hide his anxiety.

"That's very well!" said the cautious Martin-Guerre, shaking his head; "but if your friend does n't happen to be doing his turn of duty up there, or if the ladder is n't hanging from the tower, or if it breaks under our weight, or if the platform is occupied by a force stronger than ours, — why, then all chance of retreat, all hope of safety, has gone from us with that cursed boat."

"Well, so much the better," said Gabriel; "for now we must succeed or die."

"So be it!" said Martin, with heroic simplicity.

"Come!" Gabriel rejoined; "our companions ought already to be at the foot of the tower, for I can no longer hear them. Be careful about your footing this time, Martin, and never let go with one hand until you have a firm hold with the other."

"Never fear; I will do my best," said Martin.

They began the perilous ascent; and after the lapse of ten minutes, during which they had overcome innumerable

able difficulties and dangers, they rejoined their twelve companions, who were anxiously awaiting them, grouped together on the cliff at the foot of the Risbank fort.

The third quarter past four had come and gone.

Gabriel, with inexpressible joy, spied the rope-ladder hanging against the wall.

"Do you see that, my friends?" he said, in a whisper, to his little party. "We are expected up there. Thank God for it, for we can no longer look behind; the sea has carried away our boat. So, forward, my brave fellows; and may God protect us!"

"Amen!" said Lactance, solemnly.

Indeed it was necessary that these should be determined and resolute men who stood around Gabriel at this crisis; for the enterprise, which had been rash enough up to that point, seemed to become almost insane, and yet not a man stirred at the terrible news that all hope of retreat had been cut off.

Gabriel, in the gloomy light which falls even from the darkest sky, scanned their hardy features, and found them quite devoid of emotion.

They all repeated after him, —

"Forward!"

"You remember the order agreed upon," said Gabriel: "you are to go first, Yvonnet; then Martin-Guerre; then each one in his proper order until it comes my turn; and I shall be the last to mount the ladder. The ropes and knots are firmly fastened, I trust!"

"The ropes are as strong as iron, Monseigneur," said Ambrosio; "we have tried them, and they will bear thirty as safely as fourteen."

"Go on, then, brave Yvonnet!" continued Gabriel; "you have by no means the least dangerous part of the enterprise. Off you go, and be of good heart!"

"My courage never fails, Monseigneur," said Yvonnet, "especially when the drums are beating and the guns roaring; but I confess that I am no better accustomed to noiseless assaults than to swaying cordage; therefore I am very glad to go first, so as to have the others behind me."

"A very modest reason for making sure of the post of honor!" said Gabriel, who did not choose to enter upon a dangerous discussion. "Come, no more excuses! Although the wind and sea drown our words, we must act and not talk. Forward, Yvonnet! and remember that you must not stop to rest until you reach the one hundred and fiftieth round. Are you ready, — musket on your back and sword between your teeth? Look up, not down; and think of God, and not of the danger. Forward!"

Yvonnet put his foot upon the first round.

Five o'clock struck; a second night patrol passed the sentinel on the platform as he made his rounds.

Then, slowly and silently, the fourteen gallant men ventured one after the other upon that frail ladder shaking in the wind.

It was nothing so long as Gabriel, who was the last in the procession, remained within a few steps of the ground; but as they went on, and the living cluster shook from side to side more and more, the danger assumed unspeakable proportions.

It must have been a magnificent yet appalling sight to witness in the darkness and storm these fourteen apparently dumb creatures, like so many demons, scaling the black wall, at whose summit was possible death, while sure destruction awaited them at its base.

At the one hundred and fiftieth round Yvonnet stopped, and all the others did the same. It was agreed beforehand that they should halt at that point long enough for each to say two *Paters* and two *Aves*.

When Martin-Guerre had finished his devotions, he was amazed to see that Yvonnet did not stir. He thought he must have missed his count, and reproving himself for his haste, he began conscientiously a third *Pater* and a third *Ave*.

But still Yvonnet remained motionless. Then — although they were only about a hundred feet from the platform, and it was dangerous to speak — Martin-Guerre struck Yvonnet's legs, and said to him, —

"Go on, pray."

"No, I cannot," said Yvonnet, in a stifled voice.

"You can't, villain! Why not?" asked Martin, shuddering.

"I am dizzy," said Yvonnet.

A cold perspiration broke out in beads on Martin's forehead.

It was a moment before he could make up his mind what to do. If Yvonnet should have the vertigo and fall, they would all be carried down with him; to descend was no less hazardous. Martin felt himself to be incapable of assuming any responsibility whatever at such a terrible crisis. He leaned over to Anselme, who was next behind him, and said, —

"Yvonnet is dizzy."

Anselme shuddered as Martin had done, and repeated the same words to his neighbor, Scharfenstein; and so the word was passed down the ladder, each one in turn removing his sword from between his teeth long enough to say to the man next below, —

"Yvonnet is dizzy."

At last the dreadful intelligence reached the ears of Gabriel, who turned pale and trembled as the others had done when he heard it.

CHAPTER VI.

ARNAULD DU THILL, THOUGH ABSENT, CONTINUES TO EXERT
A FATAL INFLUENCE ON THE DESTINY OF POOR MARTIN-
GUERRE.

It was a moment of fearful suffering, — a supreme crisis. Gabriel saw that he was threatened by three distinct dangers. Beneath his feet, the roaring sea seemed to be calling to its prey with its mighty voice. Before him twelve terrified men, unable to move either forward or back, barred the road to the third source of danger, — the English pikes and arquebuses which were perhaps waiting for them to show their heads above the battlements.

On all sides, terror and death seemed to threaten the poor beings upon that vibrating ladder.

Fortunately, Gabriel was not the man to waste precious time in hesitating even between two formidable perils, and he made up his mind in an instant.

He never stopped to wonder whether his grasp might not fail, and his brains be dashed out on the rocks below. Clinging closely to the rope that formed one side of the ladder, he raised himself by his hands alone, and passed by the twelve men in front of him one after another.

Thanks to his enormous strength of muscle, as well as of soul, he reached Yvonnet without accident, and was at last able to place his feet beside those of Martin-Guerre.

"Will you go on or not?" said he to Yvonnet, in sharp and commanding tones.

"I am — dizzy," replied the poor wretch, whose teeth were chattering and his hair standing on end.

"Will you go on?" repeated Gabriel.

"Impossible!" said Yvonnet. "I feel as if my feet and hands were leaving the rounds to which they are clinging. I am going to fall."

"We will see," said Gabriel.

He pulled himself up as far as Yvonnet's waist, and pricked him in the back with the point of his sword.

"Can you feel the point of my sword?" he asked.

"Yes, Monseigneur! Oh, mercy! I am afraid. Mercy!"

"The blade is sharp and keen," continued Gabriel, with marvellous *sang-froid*. "At the least backward movement on your part it will bury itself in your body. Now listen, Yvonnet; Martin-Guerre will pass in front of you and I shall remain behind. If you do not follow Martin-Guerre, — mark well what I say: if you show one symptom of finching, I swear by God above that you shall not fall and drag others down with you, for I will nail you to the wall with my sword, and hold you there until they have all passed over your body."

"Oh, mercy, Monseigneur! I will obey!" cried Yvonnet, cured of one fright by a greater one.

"Martin," said Vicomte d'Exmès, "you heard what I said. Pass him and go on."

Martin-Guerre in his turn executed the evolution which he had seen his master perform, and assumed the first place.

"Forward!" said Gabriel.

Martin went bravely up, and Yvonnet, menaced by Gabriel, who carried his sword in his right hand and used only his left to assist his feet in the ascent, forgot his vertigo, and followed the squire.

Thus the fourteen men ascended the last one hundred and fifty rounds of the ladder. "*Parbleu!*" thought Martin-Guerre, whose good humor came back to him as he saw the space which separated him from the summit of the tower growing ever less. "*Parbleu!* Monseigneur discovered a sovereign cure for the vertigo."

He had just finished that pleasant reflection, when his head reached the level of the edge of the platform.

"Is it you?" asked a voice unknown to Martin.

"*Parbleu!*" the squire replied in an unembarrassed tone.

"It is quite time," rejoined the sentinel, "In less than five minutes the patrol will be making their third round."

"Good! we will be ready for them," said Martin-Guerre.

As he spoke he triumphantly placed one knee upon the ledge of stone.

"Ah!" cried the sentinel, suddenly, trying to get a better view of him in the darkness; "what is your name?"

"Why! Martin-Guerre —"

He did not finish what he was saying, for Pierre Peuquoy (it was no other than he) gave him no time to put the other knee beside its fellow, but giving him a violent push with both hands, hurled him headlong into the abyss.

"Holy Jesus!" was all that poor Martin-Guerre said.

Then he fell without a sound, concentrating all his energies in a sublime effort to change the course of his fall so as not to endanger the safety of his companions and his master.

Yvonnet, who followed him, and who recovered all his courage and boldness as soon as he felt the solid rock beneath his feet, leaped upon the platform, followed by Gabriel and all the others.

Pierre Peuquoy made no further opposition. He re-

mained standing as if turned to stone, and unconscious of what was passing.

"Wretch!" cried Gabriel, seizing him by the arm, and shaking him; "what insane fury has taken possession of you? What has Martin-Guerre done to you?"

"To me, nothing," replied the armorer in a dull voice. "But to Babette, my sister!"

"Ah, I had forgotten!" cried Gabriel in alarm. "Poor Martin! But it was not he! May he not be saved even yet?"

"Be saved after a fall of more than two hundred and fifty feet upon a rock!" exclaimed Pierre Peuquoy with a harsh laugh. "Come, Monsieur le Vicomte, you would be better employed just now in thinking about taking measures to save yourself and your companions."

"My companions, yes, and my father and Diane," said the young man to himself, recalled by these words to the duties and the risks of his situation; "but still," he continued aloud, "my poor Martin!"

"This is no time to bemoan the villain's fate," Pierre Peuquoy interposed.

"Villain! he was innocent, I tell you, and I will prove it to you. But this is not the time; you are right. Are you still inclined to aid us?" Gabriel asked the armorer, rather bluntly.

"I am devoted to France and to you," replied Pierre.

"Very well," said Gabriel. "What remains for us to do now?"

"The night patrol will soon pass," replied the burgher; "we must choke and gag the four men who compose it. But," he added hurriedly, "it is too late to surprise them. Here they are!"

Just as Pierre spoke, the urban patrol actually came out upon the platform by an interior staircase. If they gave the alarm, all might be lost.

Luckily the two Scharfensteins, uncle and nephew, who were of a very inquisitive and prying nature, were prowling around on that side. The men of the patrol had no time to utter a sound. An enormous hand closing the mouth of each one of them from behind, threw them violently upon their backs as well.

Pilletrousse and two others ran to them, and the four bewildered militiamen were easily gagged and disarmed.

"Well done!" said Pierre Peuquoy. "Now, Monseigneur, we must make sure of the other sentinels, and then make a bold descent upon the guard-house. We have two posts to carry. But have no fear of being overborne by numbers. More than half of the city militia, having been influenced by Jean and myself, are for the French cause heart and soul, and only await the proper moment to show their devotion. I will go down first to notify our friends of your success; meanwhile you can look after the sentinels. When I return, my words will already have accomplished three fourths of the task."

"Ah, I would thank you, Peuquoy," said Gabriel, "if Martin-Guerre's death,—and yet from your standpoint you did only what was just."

"Once more, Monsieur d'Exmès, I beg you to leave that to God and my conscience," replied the stern burgher. "I acquit you of blame. Now act your part while I fulfil mine."

Everything happened almost precisely as Pierre had foreseen. The sentinels belonged to the French faction in a large majority of instances. One who undertook to resist was soon bound and rendered incapable of doing any harm. When the armorer returned, accompanied

by Jean Peuquoy and a few sure friends, the whole summit of the Risbank fort was already in Vicomte d'Exmès hands.

It remained now to overthrow the *corps-de-garde* with the reinforcement brought by the Peuquoys. Gabriel did not hesitate to go down at once.

Advantage was skilfully taken of the first moment of surprise and uncertainty.

At that early hour, most of those who remained firm in the cause of England, either by birth or interest, were still asleep in perfect security upon their camp beds. Before they were fairly awake, so to speak, hands were at their throats.

The tumult, for it was not a battle, lasted only a few moments. The friends of Peuquoy shouted, "Vive la France ! Vive Henri II. !" The non-combatants, and those who were indifferent, lost no time in arraying themselves, as they always do, under the successful banner. Those who made a show of resistance were soon compelled to yield to superior numbers. There were, in all, only two men killed and five wounded, and only three shots were fired. The devout Lactance was unfortunate enough to have two of the wounded and one of the slain to his credit. Luckily he had time to spare !

It was not six o'clock when every part of the Risbank fort was in the power of the French. The disaffected and the suspected were securely confined, and all the rest of the city guard surrounded Gabriel and hailed him as a liberator.

Thus was carried, almost without a blow, and in less than an hour, by an extraordinary and superhuman achievement, this fort which the English had never dreamed of fortifying, because the sea alone seemed to be such an impregnable defence to it, — a fort, which was

nevertheless the key to the harbor of Calais, yes, to Calais itself.

The whole transaction was accomplished so quickly and quietly that the entire fort was taken, and new sentinels stationed by Gabriel, and a new countersign given out, before anything of it was known in the city.

"However, so long as Calais itself has not surrendered," said Pierre Peuquoy to Gabriel, "I do not consider that our task is done. So, Monsieur d'Exmès, I am of opinion that you had best keep Jean and half of our men here to make good the fort, and leave me and the other half to go into the city. We may do the French better service there than here, in case of need, by some useful diversion. After Jean's ropes, it will be well to make use of Pierre's arms."

"Are you not afraid," said Gabriel, "that Lord Wentworth, in his rage, may do you an ill turn?"

"Never fear," replied Pierre; "I will resort to a little artifice, which will be justifiable warfare with those who have been our oppressors for two centuries. If necessary, I will accuse Jean of having betrayed us. We were surprised by a superior force, and compelled, in spite of our resistance, to surrender at discretion. Those of us who refused to recognize your victory were driven out of the fort. Lord Wentworth's affairs are at so serious a pass that he must at least pretend to believe us, and be grateful to us."

"So be it! Go down into Calais," rejoined Gabriel, "for I see that you are as clever as you are brave. And it is certain that you can assist me, if I should decide to make a sortie."

"Oh, don't risk that, I beg you!" said Pierre, "you are not in sufficient numbers, and you have little to gain and everything to lose by a sortie. Here in your tower,

behind these good walls, you occupy an impregnable position. Pray remain here. If you take the offensive, Lord Wentworth may very possibly retake the fort ; and after having accomplished so much it would be a great shame to lose its manifest advantages."

"But do you propose," rejoined Gabriel, "that I should remain idle here with my sword in its scabbard while Monsieur de Guise and all our troops are fighting and risking their lives?"

"Their lives are their own, Monseigneur, but the Risbank fort belongs to France," replied the prudent burgher. "But listen ; when I consider that the favorable moment has arrived, and that only one last decisive blow is needed to tear Calais from the hands of the English, I will cause those whom I have with me, and all the inhabitants who share my opinions, to rise as one man. Then, when everything is ripe for victory, you may make a sortie, to give the finishing blow and open the city to the Duc de Guise."

"But who will let me know when I may venture?" asked Gabriel.

"Give me the horn which I presented to you," said Pierre, "whose note served to make your coming known to me. When you hear its sound once more, go forth without fear, and share in the triumph you have so nobly prepared."

Gabriel thanked Pierre heartily, helped him select the men who were to go with him into the city to assist the French troops in case of need, and graciously accompanied them as far as the gate of the fort, out of which they were to pretend they had been driven in disgrace.

By the time this was done it was half past seven, and the first streaks of dawn were visible in the sky.

Gabriel desired to make sure personally that the

French standards which were to bring peace to the mind of Monsieur de Guise and strike terror to the English men-of-war were hoisted over the fort. Consequently he ascended to the platform which had been the scene of the main events of that glorious but fateful morning.

With pallid cheeks he drew near the spot at which the rope ladder had been attached, and whence poor Martin-Guerre had been hurled, the victim of a fatal mistake.

Shudderingly he leaned over the abyss, expecting to see the mutilated corpse of his faithful squire on the rocks below.

At first he failed to espy him, and his eye glanced hither and thither in surprise, mingled with a faint hope.

A leaden spout, by which the rain-water from the tower was carried off, had stopped the body midway in its terrible fall ; and there Gabriel saw it hanging, motionless and doubled up over the spout.

At first sight he thought that life was extinct, but he desired to pay the last tokens of respect in any event.

Pilletrousse, whom Martin-Guerre had always been fond of, was looking on weeping, and his devotion to his friend seconded his master's pious reflections. He fastened himself securely to the rope ladder, and ventured down into the abyss.

When he reascended, bringing with him, after much labor, the body of his friend, they saw that Martin was still breathing.

A surgeon who was at hand announced that life was not extinct ; in fact, Martin regained consciousness to some extent.

But he came back to greater suffering, for he was in a sad plight. He had a broken arm and a crushed thigh.

The surgeon could set the arm without difficulty, but

he judged it necessary to amputate the leg, and did not dare to undertake so difficult an operation alone.

More than ever Gabriel deplored that though a victor, he was confined to the Risbank fort. The delay, which had been trying enough before, now became almost intolerable.

If only he could get word to expert Ambroise Paré, Martin-Guerre might be saved.

CHAPTER VII.

LORD WENTWORTH AT BAY.

THE Duc de Guise, upon reflection, could not bring himself to believe in the success of so foolhardy an enterprise; nevertheless, he determined to see with his own eyes whether Vicomte d'Exmès had or had not achieved his end. In such straits as those to which he was reduced, one can but hope even for the impossible.

So, before eight o'clock, with but very few attendants, he was already on the cliff Gabriel had pointed out to him, from which the Risbank fort could be seen with a telescope.

At the first glance that he cast in the direction of the fort he uttered a triumphant cry.

He could not be mistaken; he clearly recognized the standard of France. His companions agreed that it was no delusion, and shared his delight.

"My brave Gabriel!" he cried. "He has really been successful in his prodigious undertaking. Has he not shown himself to be a greater man than I, who doubted its practicability? Now, thanks to him, we can prepare for the capture of Calais, and make sure of it at our leisure. Let the reinforcements come from England, and Gabriel will take it upon himself to give them a hearty welcome."

"Monseigneur, it is as if your words had summoned them," said one of the duke's aids, who turned the glass

seaward at this moment. "Look, Monseigneur, are not those English sail on the horizon?"

The duke took the glass, and carefully scanned the wide expanse of the channel.

"Yes; our English friends are really there," he said. "The deuce take me! they have not lost any time; I hardly expected them so soon. Do you know that if we had made our contemplated attack upon the Old Château at this time, the sudden arrival of these reinforcements would have been an extremely bad thing for us? So much the more cause have we for gratitude to Monsieur d'Exmès. Not only does he put victory within our power, but he has saved us from the disgrace of defeat as well. However, we have no need to hurry now; so let us see how the new-comers will act, and, on the other hand, how the young governor of the Risbank fort will behave toward them."

It was broad daylight by the time the English ships arrived within range of the fort.

The French flag burst upon their sight in the first rays of dawn like a menacing apparition; and as if to impress the unexpected sight the more forcibly upon them, Gabriel saluted them with three or four cannon balls.

That removed every shadow of doubt. It was really the standard of France which was floating over the English fort. Of course, then, the city as well as the tower must be in the power of the besiegers; and the reinforcements, though despatched in all haste, had arrived too late.

After a few moments of surprised irresolution, the English ships were seen to be standing off toward Dover again.

They had on board a sufficient force to relieve Calais, but not to recapture the city.

"Thank God!" cried the Duc de Guise, in an ecstasy of delight. "Think of this Gabriel! He knows how to maintain his conquests as well as to conquer; he has put Calais in our grasp, and it only remains for us to close our hands upon the fair city."

He leaped upon his horse, and galloped joyfully back to camp to urge on the siege-operations.

Human events have almost invariably two sides; and the very same occurrences which bring laughter and delight to the hearts of some, make others weep. At the moment when the Duc de Guise was thus clapping his hands for joy, Lord Wentworth was tearing his hair.

After a sleepless night, as we have seen, and excited by presentiments of evil, Lord Wentworth had finally fallen asleep toward morning, and was just leaving his bed-chamber when the pretended fugitives from the Risbank fort were bringing the fatal news into the city, Pierre Peuquoy at their head.

The governor was almost the last person to hear it.

In his pain and indignation he could not believe his ears, and ordered that the leader of the fugitives should be brought before him.

Pierre Peuquoy was at once escorted into the governor's presence; he came in looking decidedly chopfallen, and with a bearing well suited to the occasion.

The cunning burgher, as if still under the influence of the fright he had had, told of the night assault, and described the *three hundred* savage adventurers who had scaled the Risbank fort, assisted, no doubt, by treachery within the walls, which he, Pierre Peuquoy, had not had time to unearth.

"Who commanded these three hundred men?" asked Lord Wentworth.

"*Mon Dieu!* Your late prisoner, Monsieur d'Exmès," was the armorer's ingenuous reply.

"Oh, my dreams have come true!" cried the governor.

Then, with a threatening frown, suddenly remembering what he was not likely to forget, —

"Why, this Monsieur d'Exmès," said he to Pierre, "was your guest, if I mistake not, during his stay in Calais?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied Pierre, without embarrassment. "In fact I have reason to believe — why should I conceal it? — that my cousin Jean, the weaver, has had a larger share in this business than he ought to have had."

Lord Wentworth fixed a piercing glance upon the sturdy burgher; but he looked Lord Wentworth fearlessly in the eye.

As Pierre had imagined would be the case, the governor was too sensible of his own weakness, and too well aware of Peuquoy's influence in the city, to allow his suspicions to appear.

After having put some few questions to him, the governor dismissed him with gloomy but friendly words.

Left alone, Lord Wentworth gave way to overwhelming despondency.

What could he do? The city, defended only by its weak garrison, henceforth shut off from all hope of succor by land or sea, and hemmed in between the Nieullay fort on one side and the Risbank fort on the other, both of which threatened instead of defending it, — the city could hold out but very few days longer; in fact, it might be only a few hours.

A terrible state of affairs, indeed, for the haughty pride of Lord Wentworth!

"No matter!" he said beneath his breath, still pale

with astonishment and rage, — “no matter ! I will make them pay dear for their triumph. Calais is theirs now only too inevitably ; but I will at all events hold out to the bitter end, and will sell them their priceless conquest at the price of as many dead bodies as possible. And as for the lover of beauteous Diane de Castro — ”

He checked himself, while a hellish thought caused his sombre features to light up with a joyous gleam.

“As for the lover of the fair Diane,” he resumed, with a sort of satisfaction, “if I bury myself, as I ought and will, under the ruins of Calais, we will try and see to it, at least, that he has not any reason to rejoice too heartily at our death ; his suffering and vanquished rival has in store for him a fearful surprise, and let him beware ! ”

Thereupon he rushed from the house to encourage his troops and make his dispositions.

Soothed and hardened at once in a measure by reflecting on some evil project, he exhibited such imperturbable *sang-froid* that his very despair inspired hope in more than one doubting heart.

It is no part of the plan of this book to relate the story of the siege of Calais in all its details. François de Rabutin, in his “Guerres de Belgique,” gives them in all their prolixity.

The days of the 5th and 6th of January were passed in equally energetic efforts on the one side and the other. Miners and soldiers on both sides did their duty with like courage and heroic obstinacy.

But the superb resistance of Lord Wentworth was rendered hopeless by the great superiority of the force opposed to him ; Maréchal Strozzi, who had charge of the operations, seemed to divine all the means of defence and every movement of the English as if the ramparts of Calais had been transparent.

"The enemy must have a plan of the city in their possession," thought Lord Wentworth.

We know who had furnished the Duc de Guise with that plan.

Thus it was that Vicomte d'Exmès, though he was absent, though he was unemployed at the moment, was still useful to his associates; and as Monsieur de Guise remarked in his just gratitude, his beneficial influence had its due effect even from afar.

Nevertheless, the inactive and helpless part that he was forced to play weighed heavily upon the fiery youth. Practically imprisoned in the stronghold he had conquered, he had to occupy his energy in the duty of keeping watch, which was altogether too simple a matter and too easily performed for him.

When he had made the rounds every hour with the watchful vigilance which he had learned during the defence of St. Quentin, he would generally take his place by Martin-Guerre's bedside to comfort and encourage him.

The brave squire endured his suffering with marvellous patience and steadfastness, but he could not get over his surprise and sorrowful indignation at the wicked treatment which Pierre Peuquoy had felt called upon to inflict upon him.

The perfect candor of his anger and his surprise when he talked upon that obscure subject, was in itself sufficient to have scattered any suspicions that Gabriel might still have retained as to Martin's good faith.

Thereupon he decided to tell Martin-Guerre his own story, according to what he presumed to be the true state of the case, judging from appearances and from his conjectures. It was now very evident to him that some villain had availed himself of a marvellous resem-

blance to Martin, to commit in his name all sorts of scandalous and infamous deeds, of which he was not anxious to accept the consequences, and also, doubtless, to reap the full benefit of all the advantages and privileges which he had been able to divert from his double to himself.

This revelation Gabriel took care to make in presence of Jean Peuquoy. Jean was grieved and terrified in his honest heart at the consequences of the fatal error. But he was especially disturbed as to the person who was guilty of all these crimes. Who was the miserable wretch? Was he married also? Where was he hiding himself?

Martin-Guerre, for his part, was terribly alarmed at the mere idea of such an entanglement. While he was more than overjoyed to have his conscience relieved of such a load of misdeeds of which he had borne the blame so long, he was in despair at the thought that his name had been assumed, and his good fame dragged in the mire by such a villain. And then who could tell to what lengths the scoundrel might still be going under cover of that name, even at the very moment when Martin was lying helpless on his bed of suffering!

The episode of Babette Peuquoy especially caused poor Martin's heart to overflow with sorrow and compassion. Oh, indeed, now he could find excuses for Pierre's seeming brutality! He not only forgave him, but applauded him for what he did. Certainly, it was very well of him thus to avenge his honor so basely outraged! It was Martin-Guerre's turn now to console and reassure poor bewildered Jean Peuquoy.

The good squire, in his applause of Babette's brother, forgot only one thing, — that it was he who was suffering instead of the real culprit. When Gabriel smilingly reminded him of that, "Oh, well, never mind!" said

Martin-Guerre. "I am still thankful for my accident ; for if I survive, my poor lame leg, or better still, its stump, will serve to distinguish me from the impostor and traitor."

But alas ! this doubtful consolation with which Martin buoyed up his hopes was very problematical ; for would he survive ? The surgeon of the city guard would not promise it ; speedy assistance from a master hand was of the utmost importance, and two days would soon have passed, during which poor Martin-Guerre's alarming state had been relieved only by inadequate dressing.

This was by no means the least of Gabriel's reasons for impatience ; and many a time, both night and day, he rose and listened intently for that blast of the horn which was at last to relieve him from his enforced idleness.

It was not till the evening of January 6th that Gabriel, who had already been in possession of the Risbank fort for thirty-six hours, thought that he could distinguish a greater uproar than usual in the direction of the city, and unaccustomed shrieks of triumph or distress.

The French, after a most bitter struggle, had made their way victoriously into the Old Château.

Calais could not now hold out more than twenty-four hours.

Nevertheless, the whole of the seventh was passed in superhuman efforts on the part of the English to retake so vital a position, and to maintain themselves in the last posts which they still possessed.

But Monsieur de Guise, far from allowing the enemy to regain an inch of ground, was gaining slowly but surely upon him ; so that it soon became clear that the morrow would see Calais no longer under English rule.

It was three in the afternoon. Lord Wentworth, who had taken no heed to himself for seven days, and who

had been always in the front rank, dealing out death and defying it, considered that the physical strength and moral courage of his men would hardly hold out two hours longer.

Then he summoned Lord Derby.

"How long do you think," he asked, "that we can still hold out?"

"Not more than three hours, I fear," said Lord Derby, sadly.

"But you can promise that it will be two, can you not?" rejoined the governor.

"Except for some unforeseen occurrence, I can," said Lord Derby, measuring with his eye the distance still to be passed by the French.

"Very well, my friend," said Lord Wentworth, "I place the command in your hands and withdraw. If the English, two hours hence, — but not a moment sooner, you understand, — if, two hours hence, our people have no longer any possible hope, as is only too probable, then I allow you, nay, I command you, the better to relieve you from responsibility, to sound the retreat and capitulate."

"In two hours; very well, my Lord," said Lord Derby.

Lord Wentworth then advised his lieutenant as to the terms he might demand, which would doubtless be granted by the Duc de Guise.

"But," said Lord Derby, "you have forgotten yourself in these conditions, my Lord. Shall I not also ask Monsieur de Guise to hold you to ransom?"

A dull light shone on Lord Wentworth's gloomy features.

"No, no," he replied, with a peculiar smile; "do not worry about me, my friend. I have assured myself of all that I need, — yes, of all that I desire even."

“But —” Lord Derby was beginning to remonstrate.

“Enough!” said the governor, authoritatively. “Do only what I tell you, nothing more. Adieu. You will bear witness for me in England that I did all that human mind and hand could do to defend my city, and yielded only to fate? And now it is for you to hold out till the last moment, but be sparing of English honor and English blood, Derby. This is my last word. Adieu.”

Without staying to say or hear more, Lord Wentworth, having grasped Lord Derby's hand, left the field of battle, and withdrew alone to his own deserted house, giving the most strict and explicit orders that no one should be allowed to follow him on any pretext.

He was sure that he had at least two hours before him.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE DISDAINED.

LORD WENTWORTH believed himself to be sure of two things: in the first place, that two full hours would elapse before Calais would capitulate, and that Lord Derby would demand at least five hours before delivering up the city; in the second place, he was confident that he should find his house entirely unoccupied, for he had taken the precaution to send off all his people to the breach in the morning. André, Madame de Castro's French page, had been imprisoned by his orders; so that Diane must be alone in the mansion, except for one or two of her women.

In truth he did find everything deserted as the abode of the dead, as he went into the house; while Calais, like a body from which the life-blood is ebbing away, was gathering all her force for a final struggle at the spot where fighting was in progress.

Lord Wentworth, gloomy, savage, and in a measure drunken with despair, went directly to the apartments occupied by Madame de Castro.

He did not send in his name, as his custom had been, but entered brusquely, like a master, the room where she was sitting with one of the maids who had been furnished her.

Without any salutation to the wondering Diane, he said imperiously to the maid, —

"Leave the room at once! The French will be in the city this evening, and I have neither the time nor the

power to protect you. Go and find your father; your place is with him. Go at once, and tell the two or three women who are left in the house that I wish them to do the same without loss of time."

"But, my Lord —" the maid remonstrated.

"Ah!" returned the governor, stamping his foot angrily; "did you not hear what I said? I wish it!"

"But, my Lord —" Diane began.

"I have said, 'I wish it!' Madame," replied Lord Wentworth, with a gesture of inflexible determination.

The maid left the room in terror.

"Truly, I should not have known you, my Lord," said Diane, after an agonizing silence.

"It is because you have never before seen me in the guise of a vanquished man, Madame," rejoined Lord Wentworth, with a bitter smile. "You have been a far-seeing prophet of ruin and disaster for me; and I was in truth an insensate fool not to believe you. I am beaten, absolutely beaten, beyond resource and beyond hope. So you may rejoice."

"Is the success of the French at this point really beyond question?" asked Diane, who could with difficulty conceal her pleasure.

"How can it be otherwise, Madame? The Nieullay and Risbank forts and the Old Château are in their power. They have the city between three fires, and Calais is theirs beyond cavil. So you may rejoice."

"Oh!" Diane rejoined, "with such a foe as you, my Lord, victory is never certain; and in spite of myself, — yes, I confess, and you will understand me, — in spite of myself I still am incredulous."

"But Madame," cried Lord Wentworth, "do you not see that I have left the field; that after having taken part in the battle to the very last, I could not make up my mind to

witness the final catastrophe, and that is why I am here? Lord Derby will surrender in an hour and a half. In that time, Madame, the French will enter Calais in triumph, and Vicomte d'Exmès with them. So you may rejoice."

"You say that in such a strange way, my Lord, that I do not know whether I ought to believe you or not," said Diane, who was beginning to hope nevertheless; so that her expression and her involuntary smile were illumined by the thought of deliverance.

"In order to persuade you, then, Madame," rejoined Lord Wentworth, — "for I mean to persuade you, — I will adopt another manner of speaking, and I will say to you: Madame, in an hour and a half the French will enter the city in triumph, and Vicomte d'Exmès with them. Tremble!"

"What do you mean?" cried Diane, as the color fled from her cheeks.

"What! Am I not sufficiently explicit?" said Lord Wentworth, approaching Diane with a laugh of sinister meaning. "I say to you: In an hour and a half, Madame, our rôles will be changed, — you will be free, and I a prisoner; Vicomte d'Exmès will come to restore you to liberty and love and happiness, and to cast me into a dungeon. Tremble!"

"Why, pray, should I tremble?" Diane responded, retreating as far as the walls would allow from the sombre yet burning gaze of this man.

"*Mon Dieu!* it is very easy to understand," said Lord Wentworth. "At this moment I am master; but in an hour and a half I shall be a slave, — in an hour and a quarter rather, for the minutes are flying. In an hour and a quarter I shall be in your power; now you are in mine. In an hour Vicomte d'Exmès will be here; but now I am here. So rejoice and tremble, Madame!"

"My Lord, my Lord!" cried poor Diane, repulsing Lord Wentworth, with rapidly beating heart. "What do you want of me?"

"What do I want of you!—of you!" said the governor in a hollow voice.

"Don't come near me, or I will cry out; I will call for help, and dishonor you, villain!" exclaimed Diane, in an ecstasy of terror.

"Cry out and call for help as much as you choose; it's all the same to me," Lord Wentworth rejoined with ominous tranquillity. "The house is deserted, and so are the streets; no one will answer your cries for at least an hour. Look! I have not even taken the trouble to close the doors and windows, so sure am I that no one will come in less than an hour."

"But they will at the end of that time," Diane retorted; "and then I will accuse and denounce you, and my deliverers will kill you."

"No," said Lord Wentworth, coldly, "for it is I who will kill myself. Do you imagine that I have any desire to survive the fall of Calais? In an hour I shall kill myself; I have made up my mind beyond recall. But before that I choose to give full play to my passion, and to satisfy my vengeance and my love in this last supreme hour. Come, my fair one, your resistance and your contempt are out of season now,—for I no longer beg, but command; I no longer implore, but demand."

"And I die!" cried Diane, drawing a knife from her bosom.

Before she had time to strike, Lord Wentworth sprang toward her, seized her weak little hands in his powerful ones, tore the knife from her grasp, and threw it far away.

"Not yet!" he cried, with a smile of terrible import; "I do not choose, Madame, that you should turn your

hand against yourself yet. Afterward you may do as you choose ; and if you prefer to die with me rather than live with him, you will be quite at liberty to do so. But this last hour, — for there is only an hour left now, — this last hour of your life belongs to me ; I have but this hour in which to make amends to myself for the eternity of hell to come hereafter ; so be very sure that I will not renounce my right."

He attempted to lay hold of her. Thereupon fainting, and feeling that her strength was forsaking her, she threw herself at his feet.

"Mercy, my Lord !" she cried, "mercy, I ask mercy and forgiveness on my knees ! By the memory of your mother, remember that you are a gentleman."

"A gentleman !" retorted Lord Wentworth, shaking his head ; "yes, I was a gentleman, and I so bore myself, I think, so long as I triumphed and hoped, — yes, so long as I lived. But now I am no longer a gentleman ; I am simply a man, — a man who is about to die, and proposes first to be revenged."

He raised Madame de Castro, kneeling at his feet, and held her close in a passionate embrace. She tried to pray, or to cry out, but she could not.

At this moment a great uproar was heard in the street.

"Ah !" Diane succeeded in ejaculating, her eye kindling once more with a ray of hope.

"Good !" said Wentworth, with a demoniac laugh ; "it seems that the people are beginning to plunder on their own account while waiting for the enemy. So be it ! They are doing quite right, upon my word ! It is for the governor to set the example."

"Mercy !" she managed to say once more.

"No, no !" was Lord Wentworth's response. "You are too beautiful."

She swooned.

But the governor had not even had time to kiss Diane's colorless lips, when the uproar came nearer.

Vicomte d'Exmès, the two Peuquoys, and three or four French archers burst violently through the doorway and appeared upon the threshold.

Gabriel fairly leaped upon Lord Wentworth, sword in hand, with a terrible cry.

"Villain!"

Lord Wentworth, with clenched teeth, also seized his sword which was lying upon a chair.

"Stand back!" said Gabriel to his companions, who were about to intervene. "It is my pleasure to punish the infamous scoundrel with my own hand."

Without another sound the two adversaries furiously crossed weapons.

Pierre and Jean Peuquoy and their companions took up positions so as to give them ample space, and remained silent but by no means indifferent spectators of this deadly combat.

Diane was still lying unconscious upon the couch.

Let us tell in a few words how this providential succor had come to the defenceless prisoner so much sooner than Lord Wentworth had anticipated.

Pierre Peuquoy, during the two preceding days, had, as he had promised Gabriel, aroused and armed all those who were in secret devoted to the French cause. The ultimate victory being no longer doubtful, this class had naturally become much more numerous. They were for the most part circumspect and cautious burghers, who were unanimous in thinking that since they no longer had any means of offering resistance, the best course was to arrange for capitulation on the most favorable terms that could be obtained.

The armorer, who did not want to strike the final blow until it was perfectly safe to do so, waited until his strength was sufficiently great, and the siege far enough advanced, to run no risk of uselessly exposing the lives of those who relied on him. As soon as the Old Château was taken, he determined to act. But it took him some time to assemble his fellow-conspirators, who were scattered all over the city; and it was just as Lord Wentworth left the breach, that the movement within the city made itself felt.

But it was the more irresistible in proportion as it had been slow of development.

In the first place, the penetrating blast of Pierre Peuquoy's horn had brought, as if by magic, Vicomte d'Exmès, Jean, and half of their men, rushing out of the Risbank fort. The feeble detachment which kept the walls at that point was speedily disarmed, and the gate opened to the French.

Thereupon the whole Peuquoy faction, increased by this reinforcement, and emboldened by their first easily won success, hastened to the breach, where Lord Derby was trying to make as gallant a struggle as possible.

When this sort of revolt thus left Lord Wentworth's lieutenant between two fires, what was there for him to do? The French flag had already been brought into Calais by Vicomte d'Exmès. The city militia had risen, and were threatening to open the gates to the besiegers. Lord Derby preferred to yield at once. It was only to anticipate the governor's orders by a few moments, and to avoid another hour and a half of profitless resistance, even if this resistance should not become impossible, which would make the defeat no less complete, and might lead to more cruel reprisals.

Lord Derby sent a flag of truce to the Duc de Guise.

That was all that Gabriel and the Peuquoys asked for the nonce. They remarked the absence of Lord Wentworth, and were alarmed at it. So they left, where a few dropping shots were still to be heard, and spurred on by a presentiment of evil, they hastened to the governor's residence, with two or three trusty soldiers.

All the doors were open, and they found no difficulty in making their way to Madame de Castro's apartments, whither Gabriel hurried them on.

It was full time ; and the sword of Diane's lover came most opportunely to protect the daughter of Henri II. from a most base and cowardly assault.

The duel between Gabriel and the governor was of short duration. The two combatants seemed to be equally expert swordsmen. Both showed equal coolness in a like state of fury. Their blades were entwined together like two serpents, and crossed and recrossed with the rapidity of lightning.

However, after two minutes fencing, Lord Wentworth's sword was struck from his hand by a vigorous counter on Gabriel's part.

In crouching to avoid the stroke, Lord Wentworth slipped upon the floor and fell.

Anger, scorn, hatred, and all the violent emotions which were struggling in Gabriel's heart left no room for generosity. There was no quarter for such a foe. In an instant he was upon him, with his sword at his breast.

There was not one of those who were present at the scene, inflamed as they were with indignation so lately aroused, who would have cared to stay the avenging hand.

But Diane de Castro while the fight was in progress had had time to recover from her swoon.

As she raised her heavy eyelids she saw and understood all, and rushed between Gabriel and Lord Wentworth.

By an extraordinary coincidence, the last word she had uttered as she fainted was the first upon her lips when she regained consciousness.

“Mercy!”

She prayed for mercy for the very man to whom she had herself prayed in vain.

Gabriel, at the sight of his idolized Diane, and the sound of her omnipotent voice, no longer was sensible of anything except her gentleness and his love for her. In his heart rage at once gave way to clemency.

“Do you wish him to live, Diane?” he asked his beloved.

“I beg it of you, Gabriel,” said she; “for ought we not to give him time to repent?”

“So be it!” said the young man; “let the angel save the demon’s life, — it is her proper rôle.”

And still keeping Lord Wentworth, boiling with rage, under his knee, he said quietly to the Peuquoys and the archers, —

“Come here and bind this man while I hold him; then you can imprison him in his own dwelling until Monsieur de Guise determines his fate.”

“No! kill me, kill me!” cried Lord Wentworth, struggling furiously.

“Do as I say!” said Gabriel, without loosing his hold. “I begin to think that life will be a greater burden to him than death.”

Gabriel’s orders were obeyed; and Lord Wentworth struggled and fumed and threatened in vain, for he was gagged and bound in an instant. Then two or three of the men took the ex-governor of Calais in their arms and carried him off, without ceremony.

Gabriel then turned to Jean Peuquoy, and said to him in his cousin’s hearing, —

"My friend, I have already told Martin-Guerre the extraordinary story of his impersonation in your presence. You then deplored the cruel error which led to the punishment of an innocent man; and you asked for nothing better, I know, than to relieve as speedily as possible the terrible suffering he is at this moment undergoing for another. Do me a favor then —"

"I can guess what it is," brave Jean interrupted. "You desire me, do you not, to seek one Ambroise Paré, who may be able to save your poor squire? I fly to do it; and that he may be the better cared for, I will have him taken at once to our house, if it can be done without endangering his life."

Pierre Peuquoy, in a sort of stupefaction, listened to Gabriel and his cousin, and looked from one to the other, as if he was dreaming.

"Come, Pierre," said Jean, "you will help me in this. Oh! of course you are astonished, and do not understand; but I will explain everything to you as we go along, and I shall have no difficulty in making you see the matter as I now do; and then you will be the very first one — for I know you well — to wish to repair the wrong which you have unwittingly committed."

Thereupon, after saluting Diane and Gabriel, Jean left the room with Pierre, who had already begun to ask questions.

When Madame de Castro was left alone with Gabriel, she fell on her knees in the first impulse of pious gratitude, and raising her eyes and her hands toward heaven and to him who had been the instrument of her salvation, —

"I thank Thee, O God!" said she; "thrice over I thank Thee, for having saved me, and for having saved me by his hand!"

CHAPTER IX.

LOVE REQUIRED.

THEN Diane threw herself into Gabriel's arms, — "And you, too, Gabriel," said she, "you, too, I must thank and bless. With my last conscious thought, I invoked my guardian angel, and you came to me. Thanks! oh, thanks!"

"Oh, Diane," he replied, "how I have suffered, and what a weary time it has been since I saw you last!"

"And I too have suffered, and have found the waiting weary," she cried.

They then began — at too great length to be dramatic, it must be confessed — to tell what each had endured and felt during their unhappy separation.

Calais, the Duc de Guise, vanquished and victors, — all were forgotten. All the strife and all the deadly passion which was rife about the two lovers did not reach them. Lost in their world of love and ecstasy, they no longer saw or heard the sights or sounds of the sad world around them.

When one has undergone so much grief and terror, the heart is enfeebled and softened to a certain extent by suffering, and though brave to overcome disaster, can no longer resist happiness. In this balmy atmosphere of chaste emotion, Diane and Gabriel gave themselves up without restraint to the sweet influences of peace and joy, to which they had so long been strangers.

To the scene of insane passion which we have described succeeded another similar, and yet widely different at the same time.

"How good it seems to be with you, my friend," said Diane. "Instead of the presence of that impious wretch whom I hated so, and whose love made me shudder, what ecstasy to have you near me, so reassuring, and so precious!"

"And I," rejoined Gabriel, "since our childhood, when we were happy without knowing it, do not remember, Diane, that I have ever known in my poor lonely, troubled life a single moment to be compared to this."

For a while they were silent, gazing in rapt enjoyment at each other.

Diane resumed:—

"Come and sit by me, Gabriel. Can you believe it, dear, this moment, which has united us once more in so unhopèd-for a manner, I have nevertheless dreamed of and foreseen, even in my apparently hopeless captivity? I have always felt sure that my deliverance would come through you, and that in my supreme peril God would send you, my own knight, to rescue me."

"For my part, Diane," said Gabriel, "the thought of you has always led me on as a lover and guided my steps like a ray of light. Shall I make a confession to you and to my own conscience? Although many other potent motives might have urged me on, I never should have conceived the idea of taking Calais, Diane, which is mine alone, nor should I ever have had the courage to carry it out by resorting to such reckless expedients, had it not been that you were a prisoner here, and that my prophetic instinct of the danger which beset you encouraged and stimulated me. Except for my hope of rescuing you and the other holy purpose for which I live, Calais would

still be in English hands. May God, in His mercy, not chastise me for having wished to do and having done what was right for selfish reasons only!"

Gabriel thought at that moment of the scene in the Rue St. Jacques, of the self-abnegation of Ambroise Paré, and the stern belief of the admiral that Heaven demands unstained hands to sustain a pure cause.

But Diane's beloved voice restored his confidence somewhat as she exclaimed, —

"God chastise you, Gabriel! God chastise you for being noble and generous!"

"Who knows?" said he, casting upward a look heavy with sad foreboding, as if he were asking the question of Heaven.

"I know," replied Diane, with a lovely smile.

She was so bewitching as she said it that Gabriel, in admiration of her beauty, and lost to every other thought, could not restrain the exclamation, —

"Oh, Diane, you are as beautiful as an angel!"

"And you as valiant as a hero, Gabriel," said Diane.

They were seated side by side; their hands touched by accident and met in a fervent clasp. Darkness was beginning to fall.

Diane, with blushing cheeks, rose and walked away a few steps.

"Are you going, Diane? You are flying from me!" said the youth, sadly.

"Oh, no indeed!" said she eagerly, drawing near again. "With you it is very different; and I have no fear, dearest."

Diane was wrong; it was a different sort of danger that threatened her now, but danger nevertheless; and it might be that the friend was as much to be feared as the foe.

"That is right, Diane!" said Gabriel, taking the little

hand, white and soft, which she surrendered to him once more; "that is as it should be. Let us enjoy a little happiness after all we have gone through. Let us give free play to our hearts to revel in their confidence and joy."

"Yes, indeed; it is so good to be near you, Gabriel!" Diane replied. "Let us forget the world and the uproar around us for a moment; let us enjoy to the full the unaccustomed sweetness of this hour. God, I think, will allow us to do so without anxiety or dread. You are right; else why have we suffered so?"

With a graceful movement which was common with her when she was a child, she laid her lovely head upon Gabriel's shoulder; her great velvety eyes slowly closed, and her hair brushed the lips of the ardent youth.

It was he then who rose, shuddering and bewildered.

"Well, what is it?" said Diane, opening her drooping eyes in wonder.

He fell on his knees before her, pale as a ghost, and threw his arms about her.

"Oh, Diane, Diane! I love you!" he cried from the bottom of his heart.

"And I love you, too, Gabriel," Diane replied, fearlessly, and as if in obedience to an irresistible impulse of her heart.

How their faces came nearer together; how their lips met; how in that long, sweet kiss, their very souls were blended, God only knows; certain it is that they did not know themselves.

But suddenly Gabriel, who felt his reason trembling in the vertigo of happiness, tore himself away from Diane.

"Diane, leave me!" he almost shrieked, with a note of horror in his voice, "let me fly!"

"Fly! and why, pray?" she asked wonderingly.

"Oh, Diane, Diane! if you should turn out to be my sister!" replied Gabriel, beside himself.

"Your sister!" echoed Diane, overwhelmed, paralyzed.

Gabriel checked himself, dismayed and like one stunned by his own words; drawing his hand across his burning brow, he asked in a loud voice, —

"What did I say?"

"What did you say, really?" said Diane. "Must I believe it to be literally true, that fearful word? What is the key to this terrible mystery? Can I really be your sister? Oh, *mon Dieu!*"

"My sister? Did I tell you that you were my sister?" said Gabriel.

"Ah, it is true, then!" cried Diane, gasping for breath.

"No; it is not, cannot be true! I do not know it, and who can know it? Besides, I ought not to have said a word of all this to you. It is a secret involving life and death which I have sworn to keep. Ah, Heaven have pity upon me! I have preserved my self-control and my reason amid suffering and misfortune; must it be that the first drop of happiness which passes my lips should intoxicate me even to insanity and forgetfulness of my oath!"

"Gabriel," rejoined Madame de Castro, gravely, "God knows that it is no vain and purposeless curiosity which moves my words; but you have said either too much or too little for my peace of mind. Now you must finish."

"Impossible, impossible!" cried Gabriel in terror.

"And why impossible?" said Diane. "Something in my heart assures me that these dread secrets concern me quite as nearly as yourself, and that you have no right to conceal them from me."

"That is very true," Gabriel rejoined, "and you have certainly as much right as I to this suffering. But since

the burden bears upon me alone, ask me not to share it with you."

"But I do ask it, and desire, nay, I demand my rightful share of your burdens," Diane returned; "and to go still further, Gabriel, I implore you! Will you refuse me?"

"But I have sworn to the king!" exclaimed Gabriel anxiously.

"You have sworn?" rejoined Diane. "Very well, keep your oath loyally to strangers or to indifferent persons, nay, even to your friends, and it will be well done of you. But with me, who, as you admit, have as deep an interest as yourself in this mystery, can you, ought you, to preserve this baleful silence? No, Gabriel, not if you have any pity for me. My doubts and anxiety on this subject have already torn my heart enough. In this matter, if not, alas! in the other events of your life, I am, in a measure, your second self. Do you perjure yourself, pray, when you muse upon your secret in the solitude of your own conscience? Do you think that my loyal and sincere heart, tried by so many bitter tests, will not be as steadfast as yours to retain and hold in trust the secret of joy or sorrow confided to it, and which belongs to it as much as to you?"

The soft and soothing tones of Diane's voice flowed on, moving the young man's inmost soul, as if it were an instrument obedient to her words.

"And then, Gabriel, since fate forbids our being bound together by the ties of happy love, how can you have the heart to deny me the only communion of feeling which is permissible for us, — that of sorrow? Shall we not suffer less if we suffer together? Is it not, then, very sad to think that the only bond which can unite us still keeps us apart?"

Feeling that Gabriel, though half convinced, was still in doubt, she resumed, —

“Besides, you must beware ! If you persist in your silence, why should I not adopt the same language with you which caused you so much terror and anguish just now, — why, I know not, — but which you yourself, after all, long ago taught my lips and my heart ? Surely your betrothed has the right to tell you over and over again that she loves you, and none but you. Your promised wife in God’s sight may surely, with a chaste caress, put her head upon your shoulder and her lips to your forehead thus —”

But Gabriel, with a sinking heart, again put Diane aside, with a shudder.

“No !” he cried, “have pity on my reason, Diane, I implore you. So you really wish to know the terrible secret in all its details ? Well, in the face of a possible crime, I allow it to pass my lips. Yes, Diane, you must take in their literal meaning the words which I let fall in my agony a moment ago. Diane, it is possible that you are the daughter of the Comte de Montgommery, my father ; it is possible that you are my sister.”

“Holy Virgin !” murmured Madame de Castro, overwhelmed by this revelation. “But how can it be ?” she added.

“I should have preferred,” said Gabriel, “that your pure and peaceful life should never have come to know aught of this mystery, so full of terror and crime. But I am confident, alas ! that in the end my strength alone would not have been sufficient to prevail against my love. So you must assist me against yourself, Diane, and I will tell you all.”

“I listen, Gabriel, in terrible dread, but with attention,” said Diane.

Gabriel then narrated everything to her: how his father had loved Madame de Poitiers, and in the eyes of all the court had seemed to be favored by her; how the dauphin, the present king, had become his rival; how the Comte de Montgommery had disappeared one day, and how Aloyse had come to know, and had revealed to his son what had taken place. But that was the extent of the nurse's information; and since Madame de Poitiers obstinately refused to speak, the Comte de Montgommery alone, if he were still living, could tell the secret of Diane's birth.

When Gabriel had finished the lugubrious history, Diane cried, —

“This is indeed frightful! But whatever be the issue, my friend, there is misery in store for us. If I am the Comte de Montgommery's daughter, you are my brother Gabriel; if I am the king's daughter, you are the rightfully outraged enemy of my father. So that in either event we must be parted.”

“No, Diane,” Gabriel replied, “our wretchedness, thank God, is not altogether hopeless. Since I have begun to tell you the whole story, I will go on to the end. I feel, too, that you were in the right; it has encouraged me to confide in you; and my secret, after all, has only left my heart to be shared by yours.”

Gabriel then told Madame de Castro of the strange and perilous bargain he had made with Henri II., and the king's solemn promise to restore the Comte de Montgommery to freedom if the Vicomte de Montgommery, after having defended St. Quentin against the Spaniards, should wrest Calais from the English.

Now Calais had been for an hour a French city, and Gabriel thought that he might say with all modesty that he had had a large share in bringing about that glorious result.

As he continued, the light of hope began to chase away the gloom from Diane's face as the light of dawn dissipates the darkness.

When Gabriel had finished, she remained silent for a moment in deep thought ; then she said firmly, holding out her hand to him, —

“Poor Gabriel! doubtless we have as much to think about and suffer in the future as we have had in the past. But let us not stop there, my friend. We must not allow ourselves to become weak and timid. For my part, I will do my best to be strong and brave like you and with you. The important thing now is to set to work and unravel our fate one way or the other. Our agony is drawing to a close, I believe. You have now kept and more than kept your promise to the king, and he, I trust, will redeem his to you. It is upon that expectation that we must henceforth base all our thoughts and hopes. What do you mean to do now?”

“Monsieur le Duc de Guise,” replied Gabriel, “was my illustrious confidant, and was accessory to all that I undertook to do here. I know that, except for him, I could have done nothing ; but he knows as well that he could have done nothing without me. He, only, can and ought to bear witness to the king of the part I have taken in this new conquest. I have so much the more reason to expect this act of justice from him because he promised me solemnly, for the second time, within a few days, to give that testimony. Now I am going at once to remind Monsieur de Guise of his undertaking, also to request from him a letter to his Majesty, and since my presence here is no longer essential, to start at once for Paris —”

Gabriel was still speaking eagerly, and Diane listening with her eyes beaming with hope, when the door opened,

and Jean Peuquoy appeared, discomposed, and in apparent consternation.

"Well, what is it?" asked Gabriel, anxiously. "Is Martin-Guerre worse?"

"No, Monsieur le Vicomte," replied Jean. "Martin-Guerre has been taken to our house by my efforts, and Master Ambroise Paré has already seen him. Although amputation of the leg was deemed necessary, Master Paré thinks that we may be sure that your gallant squire will survive the operation."

"Splendid news!" said Gabriel. "Ambroise Paré is doubtless with him still?"

"Monseigneur," replied the burgher, sadly, "he was obliged to leave him to attend another wounded man, more illustrious and more hopeless."

"Who is it, pray?" asked Gabriel, changing color. "Maréchal Strozzi, Monsieur de Nevers —?"

"Monsieur le Duc de Guise, who lies dying at this moment," said Jean.

Gabriel and Diane simultaneously uttered a cry of grief.

"And I was just saying that we were nearing the end of our agony," said Madame de Castro, after a moment's silence. "Oh, *Mon Dieu ! mon Dieu !*"

"Call not upon God, Madame," said Gabriel, with a sad smile. "God is just, and justly chastises my selfishness. I took Calais only for my father's sake and yours. It is God's will that I should have taken it for the good of France."

CHAPTER X.

LE BALAFRÉ.

NEVERTHELESS, hope was not yet dead for Gabriel and Diane, since the Duc de Guise was breathing still. The unhappy creatures seized eagerly at the least chance, as the drowning man clutches at a straw.

Vicomte d'Exmès left Diane's side to go and ascertain for himself the extent of this catastrophe which had befallen them just when continued ill-fortune had seemed to be relaxing its rigorous severity.

Jean Peuquoy, who accompanied him, related to him on the way what had happened.

Lord Derby, being summoned by the mutinous citizens to capitulate before the time fixed by Lord Wentworth, had sent a flag of truce to the Duc de Guise to arrange the preliminaries.

Nevertheless, fighting still continued at several points, and was made still more desperate during these final struggles, by the wrath of the vanquished and the impatience of the victors.

François de Lorraine, who was as daring a soldier as he was a skilful general, appeared in person at the spot where the affray seemed to be hottest and most dangerous.

It was at a breach already half carried on the other side of a ditch, which was completely filled with débris.

The Duc de Guise on horseback, and a shining mark for the missiles which were aimed at him from all sides, calmly urged on his men by his words and his example.

Suddenly he saw above the breach the white flag of truce.

A haughty smile spread over his noble features ; for it was the definitive assurance of his victory that he saw approaching.

"Hold !" he cried in the midst of the mêlée to those who surrounded him. "Calais surrenders ! Down with your arms !"

He raised the visor of his helmet, and putting spurs to his horse, rode forward a few paces with his eyes fixed on the white flag, the symbol of his triumph and of peace.

Darkness, moreover, was beginning to fall, and the uproar had not ceased.

An English man-at-arms, who probably had not seen the flag of truce nor heard amid the din the Duc de Guise's order to his men, sprang at his horse's rein, and threw him back upon his haunches ; and as the absorbed duke, without so much as noticing the obstacle which thus arrested his progress, drove the spurs in again, the trooper struck him in the face with his lance.

"I was not able to learn," continued Jean, "what part of Monsieur de Guise's face was struck ; but it is certain that it is a terrible wound. The handle of the lance broke off, and the iron remained in the wound. The duke, without a word, fell forward upon the pommel of his saddle. It seems that the Englishman who dealt the fatal blow was torn to pieces by the furious French soldiers ; but alas ! that could not help Monsieur de Guise. He was carried from the field like one dead. Since then he has not regained consciousness."

"So that Calais is not ours?" asked Gabriel

"Oh, indeed it is!" replied Jean. "Monsieur le Duc de Nevers received the flag of truce, and imposed most advantageous conditions, like a conqueror. But the gain of such a city will hardly compensate France for the loss of such a hero."

"*Mon Dieu!* Do you look upon him as already beyond help, then?" said Gabriel, shuddering.

"Alas! alas!" was the weaver's only reply, with a sorrowful shake of the head.

"Whither are you leading me at this pace?" continued Gabriel. "Do you know where they have taken him?"

"To the guard-house of the Château-Neuf, so Master Ambroise Paré was told by the man who brought him the terrible news. Master Paré was anxious to go to him at once, so Pierre went to show him the way, and I came to tell you. I foresaw that it would be a very important matter for you, and that under the circumstances there would doubtless be something for you to do."

"I have only to grieve like the others, — yes, even more than the others," said Gabriel. "But," added he, "as well as I can distinguish objects in the darkness, I should say we were near our destination."

"This is the Château-Neuf," said Jean.

Citizens and soldiers, an enormous, excited crowd eager and muttering, filled all the approaches to the guard-house whither the Duc de Guise had been carried. Questions, conjectures, and remarks of all sorts were passing from mouth to mouth among the restless groups, like the rustling wind among the echoing shades of a forest.

Gabriel and Jean Peuquoy had great difficulty in making their way through this closely packed crowd as far

as the steps of the guard-house, the entrance to which was guarded by a strong party of pikemen and halberdiers. Some of them held lighted torches, which cast their lurid rays upon the moving mass of people.

Gabriel started as he saw by the flickering light of the torches Ambroise Paré standing at the foot of the steps, motionless, with contracted brows, and convulsively pressing his folded arms against his heaving chest. Tears of grief and rage were glistening in his handsome eyes.

Behind him stood Pierre Peuquoy, as gloomy and cast down as he.

"You here, Master Paré!" cried Gabriel. "What are you doing here, pray? If Monsieur le Duc de Guise has still a breath of life in his body, your place is at his side."

"Ah! you must not say so to me, Monsieur d'Exmès," retorted the surgeon, quickly, when raising his eyes he recognized Gabriel. "Tell me if you have any authority over these stupid guards."

"What! Do they refuse to let you pass?" asked Gabriel.

"They will not listen to a word," rejoined Ambroise Paré. "Oh, to think that God should make so precious an existence depend upon such paltry distinctions!"

"But you must go in," said Gabriel. "Your presence is indispensable there."

"We begged at first," said Peuquoy, interposing, "and then we threatened. They replied to our prayers with laughter, and to our threats with blows. Master Paré tried to force his way in, but was forcibly repulsed, and wounded by the handle of a halberd, I think."

"It's easily understood," said Ambroise Paré, bitterly. "I have no gold collar or spurs; I have nothing but a keen glance and a sure hand."

"Wait," said Gabriel, "I will soon make them admit you."

He walked toward the steps of the guard-house, but a pikeman bowing respectfully as he saw him, barred his way.

"Pardon me," said he with deference, "but we have received orders to allow no one whatever to go in."

"Blackguard!" said Gabriel, still keeping command over himself, however; "do your orders apply to Vicomte d'Exmès, captain of his Majesty's Guards, and Monsieur de Guise's friend? Where is your leader that I may speak to him?"

"Monseigneur, he is on guard at the inner door," replied the pikeman, still more humbly.

"I will go to him, then," rejoined Gabriel, haughtily; "Come, Master Paré, follow me."

"Monseigneur, you may pass, since you demand it," said the soldier; "but this man cannot pass."

"Why so?" asked Gabriel. "Why cannot the surgeon be admitted to the wounded man?"

"All the surgeons, doctors, and quacks," replied the pikeman, "all those at least who are recognized and licensed, have already been summoned to Monseigneur's bedside. Not one is missing, so we are informed."

"Ah, that is just what alarms me!" said Ambroise Paré, with contemptuous irony.

"This man has no license in his pocket," the soldier continued. "I know him well. He has saved more than one poor fellow's life in the camp, it is true; but he is not the man for dukes."

"Less talk!" cried Gabriel, stamping his foot angrily. "It is my desire that Master Paré should go in with me."

"Impossible, Monsieur le Vicomte."

"I have said that it is my desire, blackguard!"

"Pray remember," the soldier replied, "that my orders compel me to disobey you."

"Ah," cried Ambroise, sadly, "the duke may be dying while this absurd discussion is going on!"

This cry would have scattered all Gabriel's hesitation to the winds, even if the impetuous youth had found it possible to hesitate longer at such a crisis.

"So you really wish that I should treat you as if you were Englishmen!" he cried to the halberdiers. "So much the worse for you, then! Monsieur de Guise's life is worth twenty such lives as yours, after all. We will see if your pikes will dare to cross with my sword."

The blade flashed from the scabbard like a ray of light, and drawing Ambroise Paré after him, he ascended the steps of the guard-house.

There was so much of menace in his whole look and bearing; there was so much force in the physician's calm and determined demeanor; and the mere personality, to say nothing of the expressed will of a man of gentle birth, had so much prestige at that epoch,—that the guards were subdued, and stood aside with their weapons lowered, less in deference to the viscount's sword than to his name.

"Let him pass!" cried a voice among the populace. "They have the appearance of having been sent by God to save the Duc de Guise."

Gabriel and Ambroise Paré reached the door of the guard-house without further hindrance.

In the narrow porch through which they had to pass to reach the main hall, the lieutenant in command of the men outside was stationed, with three or four soldiers.

Vicomte d'Exmès, without stopping, said to him briefly and in a tone which called for no reply, —

"I am bringing another surgeon to see Monseigneur."

The lieutenant bowed, and allowed him to pass without the least objection.

Gabriel and Paré entered the hall.

The attention of all present was too deeply absorbed in the sad business in hand to notice their arrival.

It was truly a harrowing and fearful sight which was presented to their gaze.

In the centre of the hall, on a camp bed, lay the Duc de Guise, motionless and unconscious, the blood streaming from his head.

His face was pierced from side to side ; the iron head of the lance, having entered the cheek beneath the right eye, had passed through his head to that portion of the neck immediately below the left ear, and the broken fragment projected half a foot from the gaping wound, which was frightful to look upon.

Around the bed were grouped some ten or twelve physicians and surgeons, utterly bewildered amid the general despair.

They were doing nothing whatever beyond looking on and talking.

Just as Gabriel came in with Ambroise Paré, one of them was saying aloud, —

"Thus, having consulted together, we are under the painful necessity of announcing our unanimous opinion that Monsieur le Duc de Guise is mortally wounded, beyond hope of recovery ; for in order to afford any chance of saving his life, the fragment of the lance must be withdrawn from the wound, and to extract it would be to kill Monseigneur beyond peradventure."

"So, then, you prefer to let him die !" rang out the determined voice of Ambroise Paré from behind the foremost lookers-on. He had from that distance seen with

a glance the really almost hopeless condition of the illustrious patient.

The surgeon who had spoken raised his head to discover his bold critic, and failing to do so, he resumed, —

“Who would be so rash as to venture to lay his impious hands upon that august face, and run the risk, without chance of success, of causing the death of such a sufferer?”

“I!” said Ambroise Paré, stepping forward with head erect into the group of surgeons.

And without paying any further attention to those who surrounded him, or to the exclamations of surprise elicited by his word, he leaned over the duke to get a nearer view of the wound.

“Ah! It is Master Ambroise Paré,” said the surgeon-in-chief, contemptuously, as he recognized the madman who dared to utter an opinion different from his. “Master Ambroise Paré forgets,” he added, “that he has not the honor of being numbered among the surgeons of the Duc de Guise.”

“Say rather,” retorted Ambroise, “that I am his only surgeon, since his regular attendants all abandon him. Besides, the Duc de Guise, a few days since, after an operation which I performed successfully under his eyes, chose to say to me, and very seriously if not officially, that hereafter he should avail himself of my services in case of need. Monsieur le Vicomte d’Exmès, who was present, can bear me out in what I say.”

“I declare that what he says is true,” said Gabriel.

Ambroise Paré had already turned his attention once more to the seemingly lifeless body of the duke, and was carefully examining the wound.

“Well,” asked the surgeon-in-chief, with an ironical smile, “after your examination do you still persist in your desire to extract the iron from the wound?”

"Most certainly I do," said Ambroise Paré, resolutely.

"What wonderful instrument do you propose to use?"

"My hands, to be sure," replied Ambroise.

"I protest with all my force," cried the infuriated surgeon, "against any such profanation of Monseigneur's last hours."

"And we join in your protest," shouted all his associates.

"Have you any means of saving the prince's life to propose?" asked Ambroise Paré.

"No, it is impossible," was the unanimous chorus.

"He is mine, then," said Ambroise, extending his hands over the body as if to take formal possession of it.

"We withdraw, then," said the surgeon-in-chief, and he and his associates made a movement toward the door.

"What do you propose to do?" was the question put to Ambroise on all sides.

"The Duc de Guise is dead to all that transpires," he replied, "and I propose to act as if he were really dead."

With these words, he removed his doublet, and rolled up his sleeves.

"The idea of performing such experiments on Monseigneur, *tanquam in anima vili*," said an old physician, shocked at these preparations, and clasping his hands in horror.

"Yes," replied Ambroise, without raising his eyes from the sufferer. "I am going to treat him, not as a man, not even as a beast of the field, but as an inanimate thing. See!"

He placed his foot boldly upon the duke's chest.

A subdued sound of commingled terror, doubt, and menace ran through the assemblage.

"Take care, Master!" said Monsieur de Nevers, touching Ambroise Paré on the shoulder; "take care! If you

fail I will not answer for the anger of the duke's friends and servants."

"Ah!" said Ambroise, with a sad smile, as he turned toward the speaker.

"Your head is in danger," said another.

Ambroise Paré looked up to Heaven as if for strength; then he rejoined with melancholy gravity, —

"So be it! I will endanger my own head in an attempt to save this one. But you can at least," he added, looking proudly around, "leave me to work in peace."

All stepped aside with a sort of respectful deference to the power of genius.

In the solemn silence no further sound was heard except the stertorous breathing of the wounded man.

Ambroise Paré placed his left knee upon the duke's chest; then, leaning over, he took the wooden part of the lance in his hands, as he had said, and moved it to and fro, gently at first, afterwards with more force.

The duke started as if in terrible pain.

The faces of all who were present were pallid with horror.

Ambroise himself stopped for a moment, as if afraid to proceed. The sweat of anguish moistened his forehead; but he set to work again almost immediately.

After a minute, which seemed more than an hour long, the iron at last came from the wound.

Ambroise Paré cast it away with a shudder, and quickly stooped over the yawning orifice.

When he rose, his features were illuminated with a joyous light. But in a moment his serious mood returned, and falling on his knees, he raised his hands to God, while a tear of happiness rolled down his cheek.

It was a sublime moment. Without a word from the great surgeon, every one understood that once more

there was hope. The duke's attendants wept hot tears of joy, and some even kissed the skirt of Ambroise Paré's coat.

But no one spoke, waiting for him to say the first word.

He spoke at last, his grave voice trembling with emotion, —

“I will answer now for the life of Monseigneur de Guise.”

In an hour, in truth, the duke had recovered consciousness, and even the power of speech.

Ambroise Paré finished dressing the wound; and Gabriel was standing beside the bed to which the surgeon had caused his august patient to be removed.

“So, Gabriel,” said the duke, “I owe to you not only the taking of Calais, but my life as well; for it seems that you brought Master Paré to my bedside almost by force.”

“Yes, Monseigneur,” Ambroise interposed; “save for Monsieur d’Exmès’s intervention, they would not have allowed me to come near you.”

“God bless my two saviors!” said François de Lorraine.

“I implore you not to talk so much, Monseigneur,” said the surgeon.

“Well, I will hold my peace; but just one word, — one question.”

“What may it be, Monseigneur?”

“Do you think, Master Paré,” asked the duke, “that the results of this horrible wound will be to affect my health or my reason?”

“I am sure not, Monseigneur,” said Ambroise; “but I fear that a cicatrix will remain, — a scar (*balafre*) —”

“A scar!” cried the duke; “oh, that is nothing! It

is an adornment to a warrior's features ; and the sobriquet of *Balafre* is one that I should not object to in the least."

It is well known that his contemporaries and posterity were of the Duc de Guise's opinion, who from that time (as well as his son after him) was surnamed *Le Balafre* by his generation and by history.

CHAPTER XI.

PARTIAL DÉNOUEMENT.

WE go forward to the 8th of January, — the day succeeding that on which Gabriel d'Exmès had finally restored to the King of France Calais, his fairest city, which had been lost to him for so many years, and the Duc de Guise, his greatest captain, who had been in imminent danger of death.

But we have no longer to deal with questions involving the future fate of nations; we are at present to occupy ourselves with matters of private and domestic import. From the breach in the walls of Calais and the sick bed of François de Lorraine we pass to the living-room in the dwelling of the Peuquoy.

It was in that room on the lower floor of the house that Jean had decided to lodge Martin, in order to avoid the fatigue of ascending the stairs; and it was there that Ambroise Paré had, the evening before, with his usual skill and success, performed upon the brave squire the amputation that he deemed necessary.

So that certainty had taken the place of what had before been only hope. Martin-Guerre was still in a state of great exhaustion, it is true; but his life was saved.

It would be impossible to describe the regret of Pierre Peuquoy — his remorse, rather — when he learned the truth from Jean. His stern but honest and loyal soul could not obtain its own forgiveness for such a bitter mistake. The honest armorer was constantly urging

upon Martin-Guerre to ask or to accept all that he possessed, — his heart and his strong arm, his property and his life.

But we know already that Martin-Guerre had pardoned Pierre Peuquoy, — nay, more, had approved what he had done, — without waiting for him to express his sorrow therefor.

Thus they were on the best of terms ; and we must not be surprised to find a sort of domestic council — similar to the one at which we have already been present during the bombardment — in progress at the bedside of Martin-Guerre, who was as one of the family thenceforth.

Vicomte d'Exmès, who was to start for Paris that same evening, was admitted to their deliberations, which were, all things considered, of a less painful nature to the gallant allies of the Risbank fort than on the previous occasion.

In truth, the reparation which was due to the honor of the Peuquoy name was not now beyond the bounds of possibility. The real Martin-Guerre was married ; but there was nothing to indicate that Babette's seducer was, and it only remained to find the villain.

Thus it happened that Pierre's expression was calmer and more kindly, but Jean's was very sorrowful, while Babette seemed to be in the deepest dejection.

Gabriel looked from one to another in silence ; and Martin-Guerre, stretched upon his bed of pain, was in despair at the thought that he could do nothing for his new-found friends, except furnish them with vague and unsatisfactory information as to the personal appearance of his double.

Pierre and Jean had just returned from the bedside of Monsieur de Guise ; for the duke had refused to delay any longer the expression of his gratitude to the brave,

patriotic burghers for the effective and glorious part they had taken in the surrender of the city ; and Gabriel had introduced them to him at his urgent request.

Pierre was proudly and joyously describing to Babette the details of the presentation.

"Yes, my dear sister," he was saying, "when Monsieur d'Exmès had told the Duc de Guise of our co-operation in all this, in terms which were certainly too flattering and highly colored, the great man deigned to express his satisfaction to Jean and myself with a gracious consideration which I, for my part, shall never forget, though I should live for more than a hundred years. But he gladdened and touched my heart above all by adding that he was anxious to serve us in some way, and asking me in what way he could do so. Not that I was interested for myself, Babette, — you know me too well for that ; but do you know what favor I mean to ask of him ?"

"No, indeed I do not, my brother," murmured Babette.

"Well, dear sister," continued Pierre, "as soon as we have found the wretch who so basely betrayed you, — and we shall find him, never fear ! — I will ask Monsieur de Guise to assist me with his influence in making him save your good name. We have ourselves neither power nor riches, and some such support as his may be necessary to help us to obtain justice."

"Suppose that you fail of obtaining justice, even with his support, cousin ?" asked Jean.

"Thanks to my good right arm," Pierre replied energetically, "vengeance at least will not fail me. And yet," he added in a lower voice, and glancing timidly at Martin-Guerre, "I must confess that violence has been productive of but little good thus far."

For a moment he said no more, but was lost in thought. When he shook off his absorption, he was surprised to see that Babette was weeping.

"What makes you weep, pray, my sister?" he asked.

"Ah, I am very unhappy!" cried Babette, sobbing as if her heart would break.

"Unhappy, and why? I believe that in the future the clouds will break away, and —"

"No, they will grow even darker," she said.

"No, no, everything will come all right; make your mind easy," said Pierre. "There can be no hesitation between a reparation which brings nothing but pleasure in its train, and a terrible vengeance. Your lover will come back to you; you will be his wife —"

"But suppose I refuse to marry him?" cried Babette.

Jean Peuquoy could not forbear a joyous movement, which did not escape Gabriel's notice.

"Refuse to marry him!" exclaimed Pierre, surprised beyond measure. "Why, you loved him!"

"Yes, I did love him," said Babette; "for he was suffering; besides he seemed to love me, and showed respect and tenderness for me. But the man who deceived me, who lied to me and abandoned me, who appropriated the language, the name, and perhaps the very clothes of another, to lay siege to and surprise a poor, trusting heart — ah, that man I hate and I despise!"

"But if he were willing to marry you?" said Pierre.

"It would only be because he was driven to do it, or because he hoped for favors from the Duc de Guise. He would bestow his name upon me either from fear or avarice. No, no, I pray I may never see him again!"

"Babette," replied Pierre, sternly; "you have no right to say, 'I pray I may never see him again.'"

"My dear brother, for mercy's sake! for pity's sake!"

cried Babette, weeping piteously, "do not force me to marry a man whom you have yourself called a villain and a coward."

"Babette, think of your dishonored name!"

"I prefer to blush a moment for my misplaced love rather than to blush for my husband all my life."

"Babette, think of your fatherless child!"

"It would be far better for him, I think, to be without a father who would detest him, than to lose his mother who will adore him; and his mother, if she marries that man, will surely die of shame and chagrin."

"So, Babette, you turn a deaf ear to all my remonstrances and entreaties?"

"I implore your affection and your pity, my brother."

"Very well, then," said Pierre, "my affection and my pity will reply to your words, sorrowfully but firmly. As it is necessary above all things, Babette, that you should possess the esteem of others and retain your good name, and as I prefer your unhappiness to your dishonor, since being dishonored your unhappiness will be twofold, — I, your elder brother, the head of your family, wish you to understand that you should marry, if he agrees, the man who betrayed you, and who alone has the power to-day to give you back the honor he has stolen. The law and our religion endow me with an authority over you, which I forewarn you I must use in case of need, to compel you to take a step which, to my mind, is required by your duty toward God, your family, your unborn child, and yourself."

"You condemn me to death, brother," replied Babette, in an altered voice. "It is well; and I bow to your will, since it is my fate and my punishment, and not a soul intercedes for me."

As she spoke, she looked at Gabriel and Jean Peuquoy,

who were both silent, — the latter because he was suffering keenly, the other because he wished to see what course events would take.

But at Babette's direct appeal, Jean could no longer restrain himself; and addressing his words to her, but turning to Pierre, he rejoined with a bitter irony, which was hardly in accord with his character, —

“Why do you wish that any one should intercede for you, Babette? Is it because this thing that your brother demands of you is not altogether just and wise? His way of looking at the affair is indeed admirable. He has deeply at heart your honor and that of his family; and to maintain that honor intact, what does he do? He forces you to marry a forger. Truly it is marvellous! To be sure, this scoundrel when once he is taken into the family will probably bring everlasting dishonor upon it by his conduct. It is certain that Monsieur d'Exmès, now present, will not fail to demand from him, in the name of Martin-Guerre, a bitter reckoning for his basely false impersonation, and that this will probably lead to your having to go before the judges, Babette, as the wife of this low-lived appropriator of a name. But what does it matter? You will none the less belong to him by a valid title, and your child will none the less be the recognized and acknowledged son of the false Martin-Guerre. You will die perhaps of the disgrace of being his wife, but your maiden reputation will remain unsullied in everybody's eyes.”

Jean Peuquoy uttered these sentiments with a degree of indignant warmth which surprised Babette herself.

“I should hardly have known you, Jean,” exclaimed Pierre in amazement. “Is it really you, who speak thus? — you, who are generally so moderate and calm.”

“It is just because of my moderation and calmness,”

replied Jean, "that I am able to view more dispassionately the situation into which you are inconsiderately plunging us to-day."

"Do you believe, pray," rejoined Pierre, "that I would accept with any better grace the infamy of my brother-in-law than my sister's shame? No; if we find Babette's betrayer, I am in hopes that, after all, his fraud may have done no harm except to ourselves and Martin-Guerre; and in that event I rely upon good Martin's friendship for us to cause him to desist from making a complaint, the result of which would fall upon the innocent equally with the guilty."

"Oh," said Martin-Guerre from his bed, "there is no vindictiveness in my nature, and I have no desire for the death of the sinner. If he but pays his debt to you, I will discharge him from any claim I have against him."

"All that is very fine so far as the past is concerned," retorted Jean, who seemed only moderately delighted over the squire's forgiving disposition. "But the future,—who will answer for the future?"

"I will be always on the watch," replied Pierre. "Babette's husband shall never be out of my sight, and it will be best for him to remain an honest man and walk in the straight path, or else —"

"You will inflict justice upon him yourself, will you not?" Jean interposed. "It will be full time. Babette, meanwhile, will have been sacrificed all the same."

"Very well; but you must remember, Jean," retorted Pierre, rather out of patience, "that if it is a difficult position, I simply am meeting it. I did not bring it about. Have you, who talk so finely, been able to devise any other plan than that which I suggest?"

"Yes, of course there is another resource," said Jean.

"What is it?" asked Pierre and Babette in one breath, — Pierre, it must be said, quite as eagerly as his sister.

Vicomte d'Exmès said not a word, but listened with redoubled intentness.

"Oh, well," said Jean, "may it not be possible to find some honest man, who, more moved than alarmed by Babette's ill-fortune, would agree to give her his name?"

Pierre shook his head incredulously, —

"We must not hope for that," said he. "Any one who would close his eyes to such a thing must be either in love or a coward. In either event, we should be obliged to admit strangers or indifferent friends into our sad secret; and although Monsieur d'Exmès and Martin are no doubt our most loyal friends, still I deeply regret that circumstances have made them acquainted with facts which ought never to have been known outside of the family."

Jean Peuquoy replied with an emotion which he tried in vain to hide, —

"I would not suggest a coward to Babette for her husband; but as to your other supposition, Pierre, may we not consider that, too? Suppose that some one were in love with my cousin; suppose that he, also, had been made acquainted by circumstances with her fault, but had learned of her repentance at the same time, and had resolved to assure himself a peaceful and happy future, to forget the past, which Babette surely would like well to efface by her virtue and goodness hereafter, — suppose all this were true; what would you say, Pierre; and you, Babette?"

"Oh, that cannot be! It is a dream!" cried Babette, whose eyes, nevertheless, were illumined with a ray of hope.

"Do you know such a man, Jean?" asked Pierre, in

a matter-of-fact way ; “ or is it not a mere supposition on your part, — as Babette says, a dream ? ”

Jean Peuquoy, at this straightforward question, hesitated and stammered, and was very ill at ease.

He did not notice the silent, but deep and attentive interest with which Gabriel was following his every motion ; he was entirely absorbed in observing Babette, who, breathing fast, and with eyes cast down, seemed to be battling with an emotion which the honest weaver, little skilled in such matters, knew not how to interpret.

He did not draw from it any deduction favorable to his hopes, for it was in a piteous sort of voice that he answered his cousin’s direct interrogatory, —

“ Alas, Pierre, it is only too probable ! I confess that all that I have said is only a dream. In truth, it would not be sufficient for the fulfilment of my dream that Babette should be dearly loved ; there must be a little love on her side as well, otherwise she would still be wretched. Now, the man who would be willing thus to buy his own happiness from Babette at the price of forgetfulness would doubtless have to make excuses for some disadvantages on his own side ; he would probably not be young nor handsome, — in a word, not lovable. Thus there is no likelihood that Babette would consent to become his wife, and that is why all that I have said is, I fear, nought but idle dreaming.”

“ Yes, it was a dream,” said Babette, sadly, “ but not for the reasons that you give, my cousin. The man who would be generous enough to come to my rescue by such devotion, though he should be the most withered and ugly of his sex, ought to be young and beautiful in my sight ; for his very act would show a freshness of soul which is not always to be found in the youth of twenty ; nor can such kind and generous thoughts fail to leave the

imprint of nobleness upon the features. I should find him worthy of my love, too, for he would have given me the greatest proof of his affection that woman could receive. My duty and my pleasure would be to love him all my life and with all my heart, and so that would be very easy. But the impossible and improbable part of your dream, my cousin, would be to find any one capable of such self-abnegation for a poor girl, without charm, and dishonored as I am. There may be men noble enough and kind-hearted enough to entertain for an instant the idea of such a sacrifice, and that is a great deal; but upon reflection, even they would hesitate, and withdraw at the last moment, and I should fall once more from hope to despair. Such, my good Jean, are the real reasons why what you said was nought but a dream."

"And what if it were the truth after all?" said Gabriel suddenly rising from his chair.

"What, what do you say?" cried Babette, completely bewildered.

"I say, Babette, that this devoted, generous heart does exist," replied Gabriel.

"Do you know the man?" asked Pierre, deeply moved.

"I do know him," replied the young man, smiling. "He loves you indeed, Babette, but with the affection of a father as well as of a lover, — an affection which longs to cherish and forgive you. Thus you may accept without reservation this sacrifice of his, in which is no possibility of error, and which is induced only by most tender compassion and most sincere devotion. Besides, you will give as much as you receive, Babette: you will receive honor, but you will bestow happiness; for he who loves you stands alone in the world, joyless, with no interests to make life sweet to him and nothing to hope for in the future. But you will bring him all these things; and if

you consent, you will make him as happy to-day as he will make you some day hereafter. Do I not speak the truth, Jean Peuquoy?"

"But, Monsieur le Vicomte, I am ignorant," stammered Jean, trembling like a leaf.

"Very true, Jean," continued Gabriel, still smiling; "there is really one thing that you don't perhaps know; that is, that Babette feels for him by whom she is beloved, not only profound esteem and deep-seated gratitude, but a holy affection. Babette, although she has not guessed it, has felt a vague presentiment of this love of which she is the object, and was at first relieved in her own heart, then touched by it, and finally made happy by the thought of it. Her violent aversion for the villain who deceived her dates from that time. That is why she went on her knees to her brother a moment ago to implore him not to insist on her union with that wretch, whom she only thought that she loved, in the mistaken innocence of her pure, young heart, and whom she loathes to-day with all the force with which she loves him who holds out a hand to rescue her from shame. Am I wrong, Babette?"

"Really, Monseigneur, I don't know," said Babette, with a face as white as the driven snow.

"One does n't know, and the other is ignorant," resumed Gabriel. "What, Babette, and you, Jean, do you know nothing of your own inmost hearts? Are you ignorant of your own dearest thoughts? Come, come, that is n't possible! I am not the first to make it clear to you, Babette, that Jean loves you. Surely, Jean, you suspected before I spoke, that you were beloved by Babette?"

"Oh, can it be so?" cried Pierre Peuquoy, in a perfect ecstasy of delight; "oh, no, it would be too much happiness!"

"But just look at them!" said Gabriel to him.

Babette and Jean were gazing at each other, still irresolute and half incredulous.

Then, Jean read in the eyes of Babette such fervent gratitude, and Babette so moving an appeal in those of Jean, that both were convinced and persuaded at the same moment.

Without knowing how it came about, they were locked in each other's arms.

Pierre Peuquoy was so entirely overcome that he could not utter a word; but he pressed Jean's hand with a fervor more eloquent than all the words of all the languages in the world.

As for Martin-Guerre, he sat up in bed, despite the risk, and with eyes swimming in tears of joy, clapped his hands with a will at this unexpected dénouement.

When the first transport of joy had somewhat subsided, Gabriel said, —

"Now we will arrange matters thus. Jean Peuquoy must marry Babette as soon as possible; but before finally taking up their abode with their brother, I insist that they pass a few months in my house at Paris. In that way Babette's secret, the sad cause of this happy marriage, will be buried forever in the five faithful hearts of those who are here present. There is a sixth, to be sure, who might betray the secret; but he, if he ever learns Babette's fate, which is not likely, will not have it in his power to annoy them for long — that I will answer for. So, my dear kind friends, you may live henceforth in perfect content and peace, and have no fear of the future."

"Ah, my noble, high-souled guest!" said Pierre, kissing Gabriel's hand.

"To you, and you alone," said Jean, "do we owe our happiness, even as the king owes Calais to you."

"And every morning and evening," added Babette, "we will pray fervently to God for the welfare of our savior."

"Yes, Babette," Gabriel replied, deeply moved, "yes, I thank you for that thought: pray God that your savior may now have the power to save himself."

CHAPTER XII.

HAPPY OMENS.

"WHY?" Babette Peuquoy replied to the melancholy and doubting tone of Gabriel's last words, "are you not successful in everything you undertake? — in the defence of St. Quentin and the capture of Calais as well as in arranging a happy marriage for poor Babette?"

"Yes, it is true," said Gabriel, with a sad smile; "God seems to have decreed that the most insuperable and most alarming obstacles in my path should vanish like magic at my approach; but, alas! that is no proof, my dear child, that I shall finally attain the end which I so earnestly desire."

"Ah," said Jean Peuquoy, "you have made too many others happy, not to be happy yourself at last."

"I accept the omen, Jean," replied Gabriel, "and there could be no more favorable augury of my own success than to leave my friends in Calais peaceful and happy. But you know that it is necessary that I should leave you now, perhaps to become immersed in sorrow and in tears — who can tell? Let us at all events leave no regrets behind, and let us arrange everything in which we are interested."

So they fixed a day for the wedding, which Gabriel, to his great regret, was not able to attend, and then agreed upon the day upon which Jean and Babette were to start for Paris.

"It may be," said Gabriel, sadly, "that you will not find me at home to welcome you. I hope that will not

be the case, but I may perhaps be obliged to be absent from Paris and the court for a time. But let that make no difference about your coming. Aloyse, my good old nurse, will entertain you in my behalf as well as I myself could do. You and she must, however, give a thought now and then to your absent host."

Martin-Guerre had to remain at Calais, notwithstanding all his remonstrances and entreaties. Ambroise Paré declared that his convalescence would be very slow and tedious, and meanwhile he would require the most constant care and watchfulness. Therefore his choler was of no avail, and he was obliged to yield.

"But as soon as you are entirely well, my faithful fellow," said Vicomte d'Exmès, "come to Paris; and whatever may befall, I will fulfil my promise to you, never fear, and deliver you from your strange persecutor. Now I am doubly bound to do it."

"Oh, Monseigneur, think of yourself, not of me," said Martin-Guerre.

"Every obligation will be met," Gabriel resumed; "but I must say 'adieu,' my good friends, for it is time for me to return to Monsieur de Guise. I have asked certain favors of him in your presence, which he will accord me, I think, in consideration of the services I have been fortunate enough to render during these recent occurrences."

But the Peuquoys refused to take leave of Gabriel thus. They insisted upon meeting him at the Paris gate at three o'clock, to see him once more and say farewell to him there.

Martin-Guerre was the only one who had to say his last words to his master at this moment, and they were not uttered without regret and sorrow. But Gabriel comforted him somewhat with a few of the kind expressions which came so naturally to his lips.

A quarter of an hour later Vicomte d'Exmès was ushered into the presence of the Duc de Guise.

"Oh, there you are, my ambitious young friend!" said the duke, as he saw him come in.

"My only ambition has been to do my best to second your efforts, Monseigneur," said Gabriel.

"Oh, from that point of view you have shown no ambition at all," rejoined Le Balafre (we may henceforth give the duke that name, or, more properly speaking, that title). "I call you ambitious, Gabriel," he continued playfully, "because of the innumerable extravagant requests you have made upon me; and upon my word I am not sure that I can satisfy you."

"I based them rather upon what I knew of your benevolence than upon my own poor merits," said Gabriel.

"You have a very high opinion of my benevolence, then," said the Duc de Guise, with mild raillery. "I leave it to you, Monsieur de Vaudemont," he continued, turning to a gentleman seated beside his bed, who had just come to visit him, — "I leave it to you to say if any one should be allowed to present such paltry requests to a prince."

"Consider that I erred in what I said, then, Monseigneur," Gabriel responded, "and that I based my requests upon my own merits and not upon your benevolence."

"Another blunder!" cried the duke; "for your gallantry is a hundred times beyond my power to recompense. Now just listen for a moment, Monsieur de Vaudemont, and let me tell you of the unprecedented favors which Monsieur d'Exmès asks at my hands."

"I venture to predict, Monseigneur," said the Marquis de Vaudemont, "that they are sure to be absurdly small,

both in proportion to his merit and your power. However, let me hear them."

"In the first place," continued the duke, "Monsieur d'Exmès asks me to take back to Paris with me the little band of volunteers whom he enlisted at his own expense and for his own purpose, but meanwhile to make such use as I please of them. He reserves only four men to serve as his own suite on his journey to Paris. And these brave fellows, whom he thus lends to me under pretense of recommending them to me, are no others, Monsieur de Vaudemont, than the incarnate fiends who accompanied him in that marvellous escalading expedition which ended in the capture of the impregnable Risbank fort. Well, which of us renders the other a service in this transaction, Monsieur d'Exmès or myself?"

"I must confess that Monsieur d'Exmès does," said the Marquis de Vaudemont.

"And by my faith, I accept this new obligation," resumed the duke, gayly. "I shall not allow your eight fellows to spoil in idleness, Gabriel. As soon as I can leave my bed I will take them with me on my expedition against Ham; for I do not propose to leave the English one foot of earth in our dear France. Malemort himself, the everlastingly wounded man, will be on hand, too; for Master Paré has promised that he shall be cured as soon I am."

"He will be very fortunate, Monseigneur," said Gabriel.

"So, then, there is your first request granted, and with no great effort on my part. In the second place, Monsieur d'Exmès reminds me that Madame Diane de Castro, the king's daughter, whom you know, Monsieur de Vaudemont, is here at Calais, where she has been held prisoner by the English. Vicomte d'Exmès, realizing how deeply I am engrossed with other matters, has very

opportunely reminded me to assure this lady of the royal blood of the protection and respect which are her due. Does, or does not Monsieur d'Exmès render me a service in this matter also ? ”

“ Without the slightest doubt,” replied the Marquis de Vaudemont.

“ The second point is settled, then,” said the duke. “ My orders are already given ; and whilst I am reputed to be an indifferent courtier, I am altogether too sensible of my duty as a gentleman, to forget at this time the consideration which is due to the person and exalted rank of Madame de Castro ; therefore, a suitable escort will be ready to accompany her to Paris, when and how she chooses.”

Gabriel expressed his gratitude only by a deep inclination, fearing that he might betray the interest and importance which that promise had for him.

“ In the third place,” resumed the Duc de Guise, “ Lord Wentworth, the English governor of this city, was taken prisoner by Monsieur d'Exmès. In the terms of capitulation granted to Lord Derby, we bound ourselves to admit him to ransom ; but Monsieur d'Exmès, to whom both prisoner and ransom belong, permits us to show ourselves still more liberal. In fact, he asks for our authority to send Lord Wentworth to England without requiring him to pay any price for his freedom. Will not this action give great *éclat* to our courtesy, even beyond these narrow limits ; and does not Monsieur d'Exmès thereby render us once more a service of real value ? ”

“ Undoubtedly, as is demonstrated by Monseigneur's noble appreciation of it,” said Monsieur de Vaudemont.

“ Make your mind easy, Gabriel,” said the duke ; “ Monsieur de Thermes has gone, on your behalf and mine, to set Lord Wentworth at liberty and return his

sword to him. He may leave the city as soon as he desires."

"I thank you, Monseigneur," said Gabriel; "but do not give me credit for too much magnanimity. I am only requiting Lord Wentworth for various courtesies he extended to me when I was myself his prisoner, and giving him at the same time a lesson in fair dealing and probity; I doubt not he will understand the allusion and the implied reproof."

"You have more reason than any one else to deal sternly with him upon such questions," said the duke in all seriousness.

"Now, Monseigneur," said Gabriel, much disturbed to find the principal object of his solicitude ignored by the Duc de Guise, "allow me to remind you of the promise you were good enough to make me in my tent on the eve of the capture of the Risbank fort."

"Wait one moment, I beg, O most impatient youth!" said Le Balafre. "In consideration of these three eminent services which I have rendered you, which Monsieur de Vaudemont has verified, I have well earned the right to demand a favor at your hands. I ask you then, as you are about to start so soon for Paris, to take with you and present to the king the keys of the city of Calais —"

"Oh, Monseigneur!" Gabriel interrupted, in an outburst of gratitude.

"You will not find that a very burdensome duty, I fancy," said the duke. "Besides, you are used to commissions of this sort, for you know I intrusted to your care the flags captured in our Italian campaign."

"Ah, how well you understand the art of doubling the force of your kind deeds by your manner of performing them!" cried the enraptured Gabriel.

"Further than that," continued the duke, "you will

hand to his Majesty at the same time a copy of the capitulation, and this letter, which I wrote this morning from beginning to end with my own hand despite the orders of Master Ambroise Paré. But you see," he added significantly, "no one could possibly have done you justice, Gabriel, or asked that justice be done you by others, with so much assurance as myself. Now I trust you will be satisfied with me, and that the result of what I have done will be that you will have nothing with which to reproach the king. Here, my friend, are the keys and the letter. I have no need to charge you to take care of them."

"And I, Monseigneur, have no need to say that I am yours in life and death," said Gabriel, in a voice choked with emotion."

He took the little box of carved wood and the sealed letter which the duke handed him. They were the priceless talismans which might perhaps be the means of procuring for him his father's freedom and his own happiness.

"Now I will not detain you longer," said the Duc de Guise. "You are probably in haste to be on your way; and I, less fortunate than you, find myself, after this morning of excitement, in a state of weariness, which enjoins rest upon me even more imperiously than Master Ambroise Paré."

"Adieu, then; and once more, Monseigneur, accept my heartfelt thanks," said Vicomte d'Exmès.

At this moment Monsieur de Thermes, whom the Duc de Guise had sent to Lord Wentworth, hurried into the room in a state of great excitement.

"Ah," said the duke to Gabriel, "our ambassador to the victor need not set out without an interview with our ambassador to the vanquished. But how's this," he

added, "what's the matter, De Thermes? You seem to be greatly distressed."

"So I am, indeed, Monseigneur," said Monsieur de Thermes.

"Why, what has happened?" asked Le Balafré. "Has Lord Wentworth—"

"Lord Wentworth, to whom, Monseigneur, in accordance with your commands, I announced his release and returned his sword, accepted the act of grace coldly and without a word. I was just leaving him in amazement at such discourteous behavior, when I heard a loud cry, which made me hasten back. The first use he had made of his freedom was to run himself through the body with the sword he had just received at my hands. He had killed himself instantly, and I found only his dead body."

"Ah," cried the Duc de Guise, "it must have been the despair caused by his defeat which drove him to that extremity. Do you not think so, Gabriel? It is a real misfortune!"

"No, Monseigneur," replied Gabriel, with sorrowful gravity; "no, Lord Wentworth did not die because he had been beaten."

"How's that! what was the reason, then?" asked Le Balafré.

"I beg you to allow me to say nothing as to the real reason," replied Gabriel. "I would have kept the secret if Lord Wentworth had lived, and I must guard it even more carefully now he is no more. However," continued Gabriel, lowering his voice, "in view of this proud act of his, I may confide to you, Monseigneur, that in his place I would have done just as he has. Yes, Lord Wentworth did well; for even if he had had no cause to blush before me, still the conscience of a true gentleman is a sufficiently

troublesome creditor to induce one to impose silence upon it at any cost ; and when one has the honor to belong to the nobility of a noble country, there are irreparable faults the effects of which can only be avoided by falling dead as he has done."

"I understand you, Gabriel," said the Duc de Guise. "It only remains for us to pay Lord Wentworth the last honors."

"He is worthy of them," returned Gabriel ; "and while I deeply deplore this necessary end of his career, I am glad, nevertheless, that I can still think with esteem and regret, as I take leave of him on earth, of the man whose guest I was in this city."

When he said farewell to the Duc de Guise a few moments later with renewed acknowledgments, Gabriel went at once to the governor's former residence, where Madame de Castro was still living.

He had not seen Diane since the evening before ; but she had quickly learned, in common with all Calais, of Ambroise Paré's fortunate intervention and the safety of the Duc de Guise ; so Gabriel found her calm and reassured.

Lovers are always superstitious, and the peace of mind of his well-beloved had a cheering effect upon him.

Diane was naturally still better pleased when Gabriel told her what had taken place between the Duc de Guise and himself, and showed her the letter and the box which had been intrusted to him because of his unremitting labor and his defiance of so many dangers.

But even amid so many causes for gratulation she felt the regret of a Christian at Lord Wentworth's sad end ; for though he had, to be sure, abused and insulted her for an hour or two, he had protected and treated her with all due respect for three months.

"May God pardon him as I do!" she said.

Gabriel went on to speak of Martin-Guerre and the Peuquoys, and of the escort which Monsieur de Guise had promised her, Diane, and referred to all her surroundings.

Indeed, he would have been only too glad to find a thousand other subjects of conversation to afford him an excuse for remaining; and yet the engrossing idea which called him to Paris still absorbed his thoughts to a great degree. He longed both to go and to stay; he was at once happy and anxious.

At last, as the hours passed by, Gabriel was obliged to say that he could only postpone his departure for a few moments longer.

"Are you going, Gabriel? Well, it is much better that you should for many reasons," said Diane. "I have not had the courage to speak to you of your departure; and yet by not deferring it you will give me the greatest proof of your affection that it would be possible for me to receive. Yes, my friend, go, so that I may have a shorter time to wait and suffer. Go, so that our fate may be decided as speedily as possible."

"May God bless you for your brave words, which go so far to sustain my courage!" said Gabriel.

"At this very moment," said Diane, "I feel while I am listening to you, as I know you must while speaking to me, an indefinable anxiety. We have been talking of a hundred things, and yet we have not dared to touch upon the matter which really lies nearest to our hearts and our lives. But since you are going in a very few moments, we may now revert without fear to the only subject in which we are really interested."

"Ah, you read my own heart and yours at a single glance!" said Gabriel.

"Listen a moment," said Diane. "Besides the letter you are to deliver to the king from the Duc de Guise, you will give his Majesty this other one from me which I wrote last night. In it I have told him how you saved me and set me free. Thus it will be made clear to him and to all others that you have restored his city to the king, and his daughter to the father. I speak thus; for I fervently trust that Henri II.'s affection for me is not deceptive, and that I have a right to call him my father."

"Dear Diane, God grant that you augur truly!" cried Gabriel.

"I envy you, Gabriel," continued Diane, "because you will lift the veil, and learn our destiny before I shall. However, I shall soon follow you, dear. Since Monsieur de Guise is so kindly disposed towards me, I will ask for an escort to-morrow; and although I shall be forced to travel more leisurely than you, I shall be at Paris a very few days after you."

"Oh, yes, do come soon!" said Gabriel, "for it seems to me as if your presence would bring me good fortune."

"In any event," Diane replied, "I do not want to be entirely separated from you; but I desire that there should be some one to remind you of me from time to time. Since you will be obliged to leave your faithful squire, Martin-Guerre, here, take with you the French page whom Lord Wentworth gave me. André is only a child, scarcely sixteen, and perhaps still younger in disposition than in years; but he is devoted and loyal, and will do you good service. Accept him from me. Amidst the less congenial companions of your suite, he will be a pleasanter and more agreeable attendant for you, and I shall be glad to know that he is always at your side."

"Oh, thanks for such thoughtful consideration," said

Gabriel ; "but you know that I must depart in a very few moments —"

"André knows my purpose," said Diane. "Oh, if you knew how proud he is to be in your service. He must be all ready now, and I have only a few last instructions to give him. If you go now and take your leave of the good Peuquoys, André will be with you before you quit Calais."

"I will take him with very great pleasure," said Gabriel ; "I shall at least have some one with whom I can sometimes converse about you."

"I thought of that," said Madame de Castro, with a slight blush. "But now, adieu," she said earnestly ; "we must say adieu."

"Oh, not 'adieu,'" replied Gabriel ; "not that sad word which means a long separation ; not 'adieu,' but *au revoir* !"

"Alas !" said Diane, "when and under what circumstances shall we meet again ? If the riddle of our destiny be solved contrary to our wishes, will it not be better that we should never see each other more ?"

"Oh, don't say so, Diane !" cried Gabriel ; "don't say so ! Besides, who but myself can inform you of the result, whether it be disastrous or happy ?"

"Ah, *Dieu* !" Diane replied with a shudder, "it seems to me as if, whether it were happy or disastrous, I should die of joy or grief simply upon hearing your lips speak the words."

"But how shall I let you know ?" asked Gabriel.

"Wait one moment," replied Diane.

She drew a gold ring from her finger, and took from a chest the nun's veil which she had worn at the Benedictine convent at St. Quentin.

"Listen, Gabriel," said she, in a tone of deep solemnity as she gave them to him ; "as it is probable that every-

thing will be settled before I reach Paris, send André to meet me. If God declares himself for us, he will bring back this wedding-ring to the Vicomtesse de Montgomery ; but if our hopes are blighted, let him bring this nun's veil to Sister Bénie."

"Oh, let me fall at your feet and adore you as one of the angels from heaven !" cried the young man, touched to the very soul by this affecting proof of her great love.

"No, Gabriel, no, rise from your knees," Diane replied ; "let us be steadfast and dignified in God's sight. Press upon my lips a pure brotherly kiss, as I will a sisterly one upon yours, thereby endowing you with faith and strength, so far as my power can go."

In silence they exchanged a sacred, sorrowful kiss.

"And now, my dear," continued Diane, "let us part, for it is time ; not saying adieu, since you dread the word, but *au revoir*, to meet again in this world or the next !"

"*Au revoir, au revoir !*" murmured Gabriel.

He clasped Diane to his breast in a close embrace, and fastened a long, yearning gaze upon her, as if to draw from her lovely eyes the strength of which he was so much in need.

At last, upon a sorrowful but expressive motion which she made to him, he released her ; and placing the ring on his finger and the veil in his bosom, he said once more in a stifled voice, —

"*Au revoir, Diane !*"

"Gabriel, *au revoir !*" Diane replied, with a hopeful gesture.

• Gabriel fled as if he were a madman.

Half an hour later, with renewed tranquillity, he left behind him the fair city of Calais, which it had been his good fortune to restore to the kingdom of France.

He was on horseback, accompanied by the young page André, who had overtaken him, and by four of his volunteers.

One of these last was Ambrosio, who was very glad to find an opportunity of taking back to Paris with him certain English small wares, which he expected to dispose of to advantage to the *habitués* of the court.

Another was Pilletrousse, who, in a conquered city, where he was one of the masters and victors, was afraid that he might yield to temptation and recur to his former habits.

Yvonne was also among them: he had not been able to find in provincial Calais a single tailor worthy his patronage; and his costume had been too seriously injured by the hard usage it had experienced to be presentable, — it could not be replaced suitably except at Paris.

Lactance was the last of the four; he had asked leave to accompany his master so that he might receive his confessor's assurance that his exploits had not exceeded his penances, and that his assets in the shape of self-inflicted austerities would suffice to meet the liabilities he had incurred by his feats of arms.

Pierre and Jean Peuquoy, with Babette, accompanied the five horsemen on foot as far as what was called the Paris gate.

There they were compelled to part. Gabriel said a last farewell to his kind friends, and gave them a warm clasp of his hand; while they, with tears in their eyes, wished him all happiness and showered benedictions upon him.

But the Peuquoy soon lost sight of the little band, who set off at a trot, and disappeared at a turn in the road. The good burghers returned with sad hearts to Martin-Guerre.

Gabriel felt grave and preoccupied, but not sorrowful. He was hopeful!

Once before Gabriel had left Calais to seek at Paris the solution of the mystery surrounding his destiny. But on that occasion circumstances wore a much less favorable appearance. He was concerned about Martin-Guerre, Babette, and the Peuquoy, and anxious about Diane, whom he had left behind, a prisoner in the hands of Lord Wentworth, who was in love with her. Then, too, his vague presentiments of the future were but slightly tinged with hope; for he had, after all, done nothing more than prolong the resistance of a town, which was in the end obliged to surrender. Surely, that was hardly an achievement great enough to deserve so great a reward.

But to-day he left behind him no cause for gloomy thoughts. The two wounded men, both so dear to him, his general and his squire, were both saved, and Ambroise Paré guaranteed their recovery; Babette Peuquoy was to marry a man whom she loved, and by whom she was beloved, her honor as well as her future happiness being assured; Madame de Castro was free, and treated like a queen in a French city, and no later than the next day would follow him to Paris.

Last of all, our hero had struggled so long with Fortune that he might well hope that he had at last tired her out; the undertaking which he had carried through triumphantly to its close — conceiving the idea of taking Calais, as well as furnishing the means to accomplish it — was not one of those the value of which admits of discussion or haggling. The key of France restored to the possession of the King of France! Such an exploit most certainly justified the most lofty ambition; and the Vicomte d'Exmès's ambition was no more than a just and holy one.

He was hopeful. The persuasive encouragement and soothing promises of Diane were still ringing in his ears with the last good wishes of the Pequoyos. Gabriel saw about him André — whose presence reminded him of his beloved — and the gallant and devoted soldiers of his escort ; before his eyes, firmly attached to the pommel of his saddle, he saw the box which contained the keys of Calais ; in his doublet he could feel the precious copy of the capitulation and the still more precious letters of the Duc de Guise and Madame de Castro ; Diane's gold ring shone upon his finger, — ever present and eloquent pledges of good fortune.

The very sky, beautifully blue and cloudless, seemed to speak of hope ; the pure and bracing air made the blood run warm in his veins ; the thousand sounds to be heard in the country in the twilight were eloquent of peace and tranquillity ; and the sun, which was setting in a glory of purple and gold on Gabriel's left hand, was a most comforting sight to his eyes and his heart.

It was impossible to set out toward a coveted goal under happier auspices.

We shall see in due time what came of it.

CHAPTER XIII.

A QUATRAIN.

ON the evening of Jan. 12, 1558, Queen Catherine de Médicis was holding at the Louvre one of the periodical receptions of which we have previously spoken, at which all the princes and nobles of the realm were wont to assemble.

This particular occasion was an exceptionally brilliant and lively one, although a large part of the nobility were absent at the seat of war, in the north, with the Duc de Guise's army.

Among the ladies present besides Catherine, the queen *de jure*, were Madame Diane de Poitiers, the queen *de facto*, the young queen-dauphine, Mary Stuart, and the melancholy Élisabeth, afterward Queen of Spain, whose very beauty, already so admired, was fated to cause her so much misery.

The distinguished assembly included the man who was at that time the head of the House of Bourbon, Antoine, the titular king of Navarre, — a weak and vacillating prince, who had been sent to the French court by his virile-hearted wife, Jeanne d'Albret, to try and obtain by the intervention of Henri II. the restitution of his kingdom of Navarre, which had been confiscated by Spain.

But Antoine de Navarre was already inclining to the Calvinistic doctrines, and was not looked upon with a very

favorable eye at a court which was in the habit of burning heretics at the stake.

His brother, Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, was likewise present. His was a character to inspire more respect if not more affection. He was, however, a more pronounced Calvinist than the King of Navarre, and was generally considered to be the secret leader of the rebellious spirits. He possessed the power to make himself a great favorite with the people, being not only a bold rider but very skilful with the sword and dagger, although in stature he was quite short, and had decidedly disproportionate shoulders. Besides, he was a great gallant, very clever, and passionately devoted to the ladies. A popular *chanson* of the day spoke thus of him :—

“Ce petit homme tant joli,
Toujours cause et toujours rit,
Et toujours baise sa mignonne.
Dieu gard’ de mal le petit homme.”¹

The gentlemen who, openly or secretly, advocated the principles of the Reformed religion were naturally grouped around the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé, — among them being Admiral de Coligny, La Renaudie, and the Baron de Castelnau, who, having but recently arrived from Touraine, his native province, had been presented at court that day for the first time.

The assemblage, despite the absence of many great seigneurs, was numerous and distinguished ; but amid all the confusion, excitement, and enjoyment, two men remained absorbed by grave and apparently unpleasant reflections.

¹ “He’s such a bewitching little man,
And he’s talking and laughing the livelong day,
And kissing his sweetheart whene’er he can.
God keep little Louis from all harm’s way !”

These two men, whose abstraction was caused by widely different reasons, were the king and the Constable de Montmorency.

Henri II. was at the Louvre corporeally, but his thoughts were all at Calais.

During the three weeks since the departure of the Duc de Guise, he had been thinking unceasingly, night and day, of that perilous expedition, the object of which was to drive the English out of the kingdom forever, but which was quite as likely to seriously endanger the welfare of France.

Henri had more than once blamed himself for having allowed Monsieur de Guise to attempt so hazardous a stroke.

If the undertaking should prove abortive, what a disgrace for France in the eyes of all Europe ! what superhuman efforts must be made to repair such a failure ! The disastrous day of St. Laurent would be a mere bagatelle beside that. The constable had undergone defeat, but François de Lorraine had actually gone in search of it.

The king, who had had no intelligence from the besieging army for three days, was preoccupied with gloomy forebodings, and paid but little heed to the encouraging assurances of the Cardinal de Lorraine, who, standing near the king's couch, was vainly trying to restore his courage.

Diane de Poitiers was quick to remark the gloomy humor of her royal lover ; but as she observed Monsieur de Montmorency in another part of the room, apparently in quite as great dejection as the king, she directed her steps toward him.

It was the siege of Calais which was the cause of his downheartedness, but, as we have said, for a very different reason.

The king was afraid of failure, while the constable dreaded success much more.

For success in that enterprise would definitely establish the Duc de Guise in the first rank, and relegate him to the second. The salvation of France would be the ruin of the poor constable, and we must confess that his selfishness had always taken precedence of his patriotism.

So he was very uncourteous to the beautiful favorite who advanced smilingly toward him.

Our readers will remember the inexplicable and depraved passion which the mistress of the most courtly and gallant king in Christendom entertained for this brutal veteran.

"What is the trouble with my old soldier to-day?" she asked in her most winning tones.

"Ah, so you mock me too, do you, Madame?" said Montmorency, sharply.

"I mock you, my friend! You don't realize what you are saying."

"I was thinking of what you said yourself," rejoined the constable, with a muttered curse. "You called me your old soldier. Old? yes, that is true; I am no longer a beau of twenty years. Soldier? no. You can see plainly that I am no longer considered good for anything except to show myself with my parade sword in the halls of the Louvre."

"Do not speak so," said the favorite, with an affectionate smile. "Are you not still the *constable*?"

"What does a constable amount to, when there is a lieutenant-general of the kingdom?"

"The latter title expires with the circumstances which called it into existence, while yours, being attached, with no power of revocation, to the highest military dignity in the kingdom, will last as long as your life."

"But I am already dead and buried," said the constable, with a bitter laugh.

"Why do you say that, my friend?" replied Madame de Poitiers. "You have not ceased to be as powerful and as formidable to the nation's enemies without as to your personal enemies within."

"Let us talk seriously, Diane, and not try to flatter or deceive each other with empty words."

"If I deceive you, it is only because I myself am deceived," Diane rejoined. "Give me proofs that I am wrong, and I will not only acknowledge my error on the spot, but I will do all I can to rectify it."

"Very well," said the constable; "in the first place, you speak of the enemies without trembling before me. Those are very comforting words; but, in reality, who is sent against these enemies?—a general who is younger and doubtless more fortunate than myself, but who may some day turn this good fortune of his to his own private advantage."

"What makes you think that the Duc de Guise will succeed?" asked Diane, with most subtle flattery.

"His failure," replied the constable, hypocritically, "would be a terrible misfortune for France, which I should bitterly deplore for my country's sake; but his success would perhaps be an even more terrible misfortune, which I should dread for the sake of my sovereign."

"Do you believe then," said Diane, "that the ambition of Monsieur de Guise—"

"I have probed it, and it is very deep," replied the jealous courtier. "If by any chance there should be a change of reign, have you considered what that ambition, assisted by the influence of Mary Stuart, might be able to effect upon the mind of a young and inexperienced king? My devotion to your interests has completely

alienated Queen Catherine from me. The Guises will be more sovereign than the sovereign himself."

"Such a catastrophe is, thank God, very improbable and very far distant," returned Diane, who could not avoid the reflection that her friend of sixty years was rather free with his conjectures as to the prospects of the early demise of a king who was but forty.

"There are other chances against us much nearer at hand and almost as terrible," said Montmorency, shaking his head very gravely.

"What are they, my friend?"

"Have you lost your memory, Diane, or do you only pretend to forget who went to Calais with the Duc de Guise; who, apparently, was the one who first breathed a suggestion of this foolhardy enterprise into his ear, and who will return in triumph with him, if he does triumph, and will no doubt succeed in receiving credit for some share in the victory?"

"Are you speaking of Vicomte d'Exmès?" asked Diane.

"Of whom else, Madame? Even though you may have forgotten his extravagant undertaking, he will remember it, never fear! And more than that, fortune is so capricious that he is quite capable of having kept his promise, and of loudly calling upon the king to redeem his."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Diane.

"What is it that seems impossible to you, Madame, — that Monsieur d'Exmès should keep his word, or that the king should be true to his?"

"Either supposition is absurd and insane, and the second even more so than the first."

"If, however, the first should be realized, it may very well be that the second will follow; for the king is very weak on these questions of honor, and he would be quite

capable, Madame, of priding himself upon his chivalrous loyalty, and of disclosing his secret and ours to a common foe."

"Once more I say it is a wild, impossible dream," cried Diane, turning pale, nevertheless.

"But, Diane, suppose you were to see this dream with your eyes, and touch it with your hands, what would you do?"

"Indeed I do not know, my good constable," said Madame de Valentinois; "we should have to consult and look around, and then *act*. Anything rather than that extremity! If the king abandons us, why, then, we must get along without him; and confidently anticipating that he will never dare to disavow what we have done after the event, we must exercise our own power and our personal influence and credit to the utmost."

"Ah, that is just what I expected you would say!" said the constable. "Our power! our personal influence! Speak of your own, Madame; but as for mine, it has sunk so low that in truth I look upon it as dead and gone. My enemies within, for whom just now you expressed so much pity, might have very pretty sport with me at this time. There is no gentleman at this court who has n't more power than this pitiful constable. You can see yourself how I am avoided. It is very simple; for who would care to pay his court to a fallen star? It will be much safer, therefore, Madame, for you not to rely hereafter upon the support of a discredited, disgraced old servant, friendless and without influence, yes, even penniless."

"Penniless?" Diane echoed incredulously.

"Why yes, Madame, — penniless, by the Mass!" said the constable a second time, and angrily. "That is perhaps the most grievous part of it, at my age, and after

all the services I have rendered. The last war ruined me ; for my ransom and those of several of my people exhausted my last pecuniary resources. Those who abandon me know it very well. I shall be reduced one of these days to going about the streets asking for alms, like Belisarius, the Carthaginian general, I think it was, whom I have heard my nephew, the admiral, speak of."

"What! have your friends all left you, my constable?" asked Diane, smiling at her old lover's erudition, as well as at his covetousness.

"Yes," said the constable ; "I have no friends, I tell you." He added, most pathetically, — "The unfortunate never have friends."

"I propose to prove you in the wrong," said Diane. "I can clearly see now the source of this sullen humor which has gained control of you. But why did you not tell me in the first place? Do you lack confidence in me, pray? It is sad, indeed, if you do. But no matter! I only intend to be revenged in a friendly way. Tell me, did not the king impose a new tax last week?"

"Yes, dear Diane," replied the constable, who had grown much calmer under the influence of Diane's words ; "a very just tax, too, and heavy enough to defray all the expenses of the war."

"That will do very well," said Diane ; "and I will show you that even a woman may be able to do more than repair fortune's cruel blows to such men as you. Henri seems to me to be in a very ill-humor to-day. But never mind! I will speak with him forthwith ; and you will soon be forced to agree that I am a kind friend and faithful ally."

"Ah, Diane, you are as kind and good as you are

beautiful ! That I will always maintain," said Montmorency, gallantly.

"But when I have replenished the springs from which your influence and your favor flow, you will not abandon me, will you, my old lion ? And you will not talk any more to your devoted friend of your powerlessness against her enemies and yours ?"

"Why, my dear Diane, are not all that I am and all that I have at your service ?" said the constable ; "and if I sometimes grieve at the loss of my influence, is it not because I fear thereby to be less powerful to serve my beautiful sovereign mistress ?"

"Very good !" said Diane, with her most seductive smile.

She gave her lovely white hand to her superannuated lover, who imprinted upon it a tender kiss with his bearded lips ; then, with a last encouraging glance, she moved away from him toward the king.

The Cardinal de Lorraine was still at Henri's side, watching over the interests of his absent brother, and doing his utmost to remove the king's fears as to the issue of the ill-considered expedition against Calais.

But Henri was paying more attention to his unquiet thoughts than to the cardinal's consoling words.

It was at this moment that Madame Diane approached them.

"I'll undertake to say, Messire," she began, addressing the cardinal with much warmth, "that your Eminence is saying to the king something unkind about poor Monsieur de Montmorency."

"Oh, Madame," retorted Charles de Lorraine, bewildered by this unexpected attack, "I venture to ask his Majesty to bear me witness that the name of Monsieur le Connétable has not been once uttered during our interview."

"That is true," said the king, carelessly.

"That is merely another way of doing him a disservice."

"But if I can neither speak nor keep silent about him, what am I to do, Madame, I beg?"

"You should say pleasant things about him," replied Diane.

"Very well, then," retorted the wily cardinal; "if I must do that, I will say (for the commands of beauty have never found me lacking in dutiful submission) that Monsieur de Montmorency is a great commander; that he won the battle of St. Laurent, and retrieved the fortunes of France; and that just at this time, to put the finishing touch to his work, he has assumed the offensive against our enemies, and is now engaged in attempting a memorable and glorious achievement under the walls of Calais."

"Calais! Calais!—ah, who will bring me news of Calais?" murmured the king, who had heard only that name in this war of words between the minister and the favorite.

"You have an admirable and Christian-like manner of awarding praise, Monsieur le Cardinal," Diane rejoined; "and I congratulate you upon your mastery of ironical compliment."

"Well, Madame," said Charles de Lorraine, "in truth, I do not see how else I could award praise to this poor Monsieur de Montmorency, as you called him just now."

"You are not honest in your search, Messire," replied Diane. "Might you not, for instance, do more justice to the zeal with which the constable organized means of defence at Paris, and brought the few troops who were left here to a state of efficiency, while others were jeopardiz-

ing and compromising the vital forces of the kingdom in rash and foolhardy enterprises ? ”

“ Oh-ho ! ” exclaimed the cardinal.

“ Alas ! ” sighed the king, who heard nothing except what bore directly upon the subject of his solicitude.

“ Might we not say, further,” added Diane, “ that although chance has not been friendly to Monsieur de Montmorency’s magnificent efforts, and fortune has declared against him, he is at least entirely without personal ambition ; he recognizes no other interest save that of his country, in whose cause he has sacrificed everything, — his life, which he was among the first to put in jeopardy ; his liberty, of which he was so long deprived ; and his property, which is all gone.”

“ Indeed ! ” said Charles de Lorraine, with an air of amazement.

“ Yes, your Eminence,” Diane repeated ; “ there is no doubt about that, — Monsieur de Montmorency is ruined.”

“ Ruined ! Do you mean it ? ” said the cardinal.

“ He is so entirely without means,” continued the unblushing favorite, “ that I was just on the point of appealing to his Majesty to aid this loyal servant in his distress.”

The king made no reply, so absorbed was he.

“ Yes, Sire,” Diane said, addressing him directly in order to attract his attention, “ I most earnestly beg you to come to the assistance of your faithful constable, whose pecuniary resources have been exhausted to the last sou by the price of his ransom and the great expense of the war contracted in your Majesty’s service. Sire, are you listening to me ? ”

“ Excuse me, Madame,” said Henri ; “ I seem hardly able this evening to fix my attention upon any subject.

The thought of a possible disaster at Calais occupies my mind entirely, as you can well understand."

"That is just the reason," Diane replied, "why your Majesty, in my opinion, ought to treat gently and befriend the man who has done his best beforehand to minimize the effects of this calamity, if it must befall."

"But we are as much in need of money ourselves as the constable," said the king.

"How about this new tax which has been levied?" asked Diane.

"The funds produced by that," said the cardinal, "are to be appropriated to the payment and maintenance of the troops."

"In that event," was Diane's rejoinder, "the better part of them should go to the leader of the troops."

"Very well, the leader is at Calais?" replied the cardinal.

"No, indeed, he is here in Paris, at the Louvre," retorted Diane.

"Pray, Madame, do you desire that failure and defeat should be rewarded?"

"That would be much better, Monsieur le Cardinal, than that mad recklessness should be encouraged."

"Enough of this!" the king interposed; "do you not see that your quarrelling tires and annoys me? Do you know, Madame, and Monsieur de Lorraine, the quatrain which I came across recently in my book of Hours?"

"A quatrain?" Diane and Charles de Lorraine repeated with one breath.

"If my memory serves me," said Henri, "it was this:—

"Sire, si vous laissez, comme Charles désire,
Comme Diane fait, par trop vous gouverner,

Fondre, pétrir, mollir, refondre et retourner,
Sire, vous n'êtes plus, vous n'êtes plus que cire.'"¹

Diane did not lose her self-possession in the least.

"A pretty piece of foolery," said she; "but it credits me with much more influence over his Majesty's mind than I possess, alas!"

"Ah, Madame," rejoined the king, "you ought not to make a bad use of that influence just because you know that you possess it."

"But do I really possess it, Sire?" said Diane, in her most winning tones. "If it be so, your Majesty will grant what I ask in behalf of the constable."

"Very well," said the king, impatiently; "now I trust you will leave me to my gloomy forebodings and my anxiety."

The cardinal, in the face of such weakness, could only raise his eyes imploringly to heaven. Diane darted a triumphant glance at him.

"Thanks, your Majesty," she said to the king. "I obey you and withdraw; but pray dismiss your anxiety and dread, Sire, for victory loves the generous-hearted, and I firmly believe that you will be victorious."

"Ah, I accept the augury, Diane," replied Henri. "With what transports of joy would I receive information to that effect! For a long time I have not slept; I have hardly existed. *Mon Dieu*, how slight after all is the power of kings! To think that I have at this moment no means of knowing what is transpiring at

¹ "Oh, Sire, be careful; for if you allow,
As Charles ever longs to, and Diane does now,
The one or the other, or both, to derange you,
To shape you and work you, remodel and change you,
By yielding too freely to all their demands,
Soon you'll be like the softest of wax in their hands."

Calais! You may well say, Monsieur le Cardinal, that your brother's silence is most alarming. Ah, for news from Calais! Who will bring it to me? In God's name, who?"

An usher entered, and bowing low before the king as the last word fell from his lips, announced in a loud voice, —

"A messenger from Monsieur de Guise has arrived from Calais, and solicits the honor of an audience of his Majesty."

"A messenger from Calais!" echoed the king, rising to his feet, with gleaming eye, and almost beside himself.

"At last!" said the cardinal, trembling between joy and fear.

"Introduce Monsieur de Guise's messenger; introduce him at once," added the king, eagerly.

It need not be said that every voice was hushed, every heart beating high, and that all eyes were turned toward the door.

Gabriel entered amid a profound silence.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE VICOMTE DE MONTGOMMERY.

GABRIEL was attended as he had been on his return from Italy by four of his people, — Ambroise, Lactance, Yvonné, and Pilletrousse, — who bore the English flags; but they came no farther than the threshold.

The youth himself held in both hands a velvet cushion, upon which were two letters and the keys of the city.

At this sight Henri's countenance assumed an expression of joy and fear curiously blended.

He thought that he understood the welcome message, but the stern messenger made him anxious.

"Vicomte d'Exmès!" he muttered, as he saw Gabriel slowly approaching him.

Madame de Poitiers and the constable, exchanging looks of consternation, also faltered beneath their breath.

"Vicomte d'Exmès!"

Gabriel, meanwhile, with a grave and solemn mien, kneeled before the king, and said with a firm, clear voice, —

"Sire, here are the keys of the city of Calais, which was surrendered to Monsieur de Guise by the English, after a siege of seven days and three fierce assaults, and which Monsieur has made haste to deliver to your Majesty."

"Calais is ours?" asked the king, although he had heard and understood perfectly.

"Calais is yours, Sire," Gabriel repeated.

"*Vive le roi!*" with one accord cried all who were present, with the possible exception of the Constable de Montmorency.

Henri II., who could think of nothing now but his vanished fears and the glorious triumph of his arms, saluted the excited assemblage with radiant face.

"Thanks, Messieurs, thanks!" said he; "I accept your congratulations in the name of France. But they should not be addressed to me alone; it is but fair that the better part of them should be reserved for the gallant leader of the undertaking, — my noble cousin, Monsieur de Guise."

Murmurs of approbation were heard throughout the assemblage; but the time had not yet arrived when any one dared to cry, "*Vive le Duc de Guise,*" in the king's presence.

"In our dear cousin's absence," continued Henri, "we are happy in being able to address our thanks and congratulations to you who represent him here, Monsieur le Cardinal de Lorraine, and to you, Monsieur le Vicomte d'Exmès, whom he has intrusted with this glorious and honorable commission."

"Sire," said Gabriel, respectfully but firmly, as he inclined his head in acknowledgment of the king's words, "Sire, your pardon, but I am no longer called Vicomte d'Exmès."

"What!" exclaimed Henri, with a frown.

"Sire," Gabriel continued, "since the day that Calais fell, I have felt justified in assuming my real name and my true title, — Vicomte de Montgomery."

At that name, which for so many years had not been pronounced at court save in whispers, there was a veritable explosion of surprise among the bystanders. This

youth styled himself Vicomte de Montgomery; then the Comte de Montgomery, his father, doubtless must still be alive! What was the significance of the revival of that name, once so renowned, after so long a disappearance?

The king did not hear these comments, which were quite inaudible, but he had no difficulty in divining their import; he had become paler than his Italian strawberries, and his lips were trembling with impatience and indignation.

Madame de Poitiers was also in a tremor; and the constable in his corner had emerged from his gloomy impassiveness, and his roving look had become fixed.

“What do you mean, Monsieur?” returned the king, in a tone which he found great difficulty in keeping within bounds. “What is this name which you venture to assume, and whence do you derive so much imprudence?”

“The name is mine, Sire,” said Gabriel, calmly; “and what your Majesty regards as imprudence is only confidence.”

It was evident that Gabriel had determined to enter boldly upon the course he had adopted, to risk all that he might gain all, and to make all hesitation or avoidance of the issue impossible for the king as well as for himself.

Henri understood his words in that sense; but he dreaded the consequences of his own wrath, and so he replied, in order to postpone the outburst which he feared, —

“Your personal affairs may be attended to later, Monsieur; but at present be good enough to remember that you are the messenger of Monsieur de Guise. I think you have not yet fully executed your commission.”

“That is true,” said Gabriel, with a low bow. “I

have still to present to your Majesty the flags conquered from the English. Behold them, Sire! Furthermore, Monsieur le Duc de Guise sends this letter to the king."

He presented Le Balafre's letter upon the cushion. The king took it, broke the seal, tore open the envelope, and said to the cardinal as he passed the letter to him, —

"To you, Monsieur le Cardinal, rightly belongs the pleasure of reading aloud your brother's letter. It is not addressed to the king, but to France."

"What, Sire!" said the cardinal, "does your Majesty really wish —"

"It is my desire, Monsieur le Cardinal, that you should accept the honor which is your due."

Charles de Lorraine bowed, and took the letter respectfully from the king's hands, unfolded it, and amid profound silence read what follows: —

"SIRE, — Calais is in our power; we have wrested in one week from the English a city which cost them a year's siege two centuries ago.

"Guines and Ham, the last two posts which are still in their possession in France, can now hold out but a short time; and I venture to promise your Majesty that within a fortnight our hereditary enemies will have been definitely expelled from the kingdom.

"I thought it my duty to be generous to the conquered. They gave up their artillery and their supplies; but the terms of capitulation to which I gave my assent allowed all such inhabitants of Calais as might so desire to withdraw, with their property, to England. Indeed, perhaps it would have been hazardous to leave so potent an element of discord in a newly-captured city.

"The number of dead and wounded is very small, thanks to the rapidity with which the place was carried.

"Time and leisure fail me, Sire, to furnish your Majesty with more ample details to-day. Being myself seriously wounded —"

At this point the cardinal turned pale, and ceased to read.

"What, our cousin wounded!" cried the king, feigning anxiety.

"Your Majesty and your Eminence may be reassured," said Gabriel. "Monsieur le Duc de Guise's wound will have no serious results, thank God! At present there remains of its effects nought but a noble scar upon his face and the glorious surname of *Le Balafré*."

The cardinal had meanwhile read a few lines in advance, and convinced himself that what Gabriel said was true, and with renewed calmness resumed his reading as follows: —

"Being myself seriously wounded the very day of our entry into Calais, I was saved by the prompt assistance and marvellous skill of a young surgeon, Master Ambroise Paré; but I am still very weak, and consequently obliged to forego the pleasure of writing more at length to your Majesty.

"You will be able to learn further details from him who brings to you with this letter the keys of the city, along with the English flags, and of whom I must say a word to your Majesty before I close.

"For it is not to me, Sire, by any means, that all the honor of this marvellous capture of Calais belongs. I have striven to contribute to it with all my power with the aid of our gallant troops; but we owe the first conception of it, as well as the means of execution and its final success, to the bearer of this letter, Monsieur le Vicomte d'Exmès —"

"It would appear, Monsieur," the king interposed, addressing Gabriel, "that our cousin does not yet know you under your new name."

"Sire," replied Gabriel, "I should not have presumed to assume it for the first time except in your Majesty's presence."

At a sign from the king, the cardinal continued, —

"In fact, I must admit that I had never dreamed of this bold stroke when Monsieur d'Exmès sought me out at the Louvre, laid bare to me his sublime project, answered my objections and did away with my doubts, and finally induced me to undertake this unprecedented exploit, which would be sufficient of itself, Sire, to make a reign glorious.

"But that is not all. The risks of such a momentous undertaking were not to be lightly incurred; it was essential that the counsel of long experience should give its sanction to the dream of ardent courage. Monsieur d'Exmès provided the means of introducing Monsieur le Maréchal Strozzi into Calais in disguise, and thus of obtaining accurate information as to the opportunities of attack and means of defence. Beyond that, he gave us an exact detailed plan of the ramparts and fortified positions, so that we made our approaches to Calais with as much confidence as if the walls had been of glass.

"Before the walls of the city, and in all the assaults, at the Nieulay fort and the Old Château, — everywhere, in fact, Vicomte d'Exmès, at the head of a small band, raised at his own expense, performed prodigies of valor. But on those occasions he was only on a level with many of our gallant captains, who cannot, in my humble opinion, be surpassed. Therefore I touch but lightly upon the proofs of gallantry which he afforded on every occasion, to confine myself to those deeds in which he stands alone, and without a compeer.

"Thus, the Risbank fort, which at once protected from attack and afforded free entrance to Calais on the ocean side, would have made it possible for strong reinforcements from England to be thrown into the city. In that event we should have been lost, — nay, exterminated; our gigantic enterprise would have proved a failure, and made us the laughing-stock of all Europe. The question then was how, without ships, we could carry a fort which was defended by the ocean? Very

well! Vicomte d'Exmès performed that miracle. In the night-time, alone with his volunteers upon a little boat, aided by a secret understanding with certain parties within the walls, he succeeded, after a hazardous voyage and an escalading feat terrible to think of, in planting the French flag upon that impregnable fort."

At this point, notwithstanding the king's presence, the reading was interrupted for a moment by a murmur of admiration which nothing could restrain, and which burst from that assemblage of illustrious and valiant men as if it were the irresistible expression of the feeling of all hearts.

Gabriel's bearing, as he stood with lowered eyes, calm and dignified and modest, two or three paces from the king, added to the favorable impression caused by the narration of his exploit, and attracted the admiration of the young women and the old soldiers at once.

The king, too, was touched; and the glance which he gave the hero of this glorious adventure showed signs of a softer feeling for him. Madame de Poitiers alone bither colorless lips, while Monsieur de Montmorency knit his thick eyebrows savagely.

The cardinal, after this brief interruption, resumed the reading of his brother's letter.

"The Risbank fort once won, the city was ours. The English men-of-war did not dare to risk a hopeless attack. Three days after, we entered Calais in triumph, sustained even then by a well-planned diversion by Monsieur d'Exmès's allies in the city, and by a vigorous sortie which he himself led.

"It was in this final struggle, Sire, that I received the terrible wound which almost cost me my life; and if I may be allowed to call attention to a service personal to myself amid so many public services, I will add that Monsieur d'Exmès, almost by force, brought to what nearly proved to be my death-bed Master Paré, the surgeon who saved my life."

"Oh, Monsieur, let me thank you in my turn," said Charles de Lorraine, interrupting himself, with deep emotion.

Then he resumed with even more warmth and vigor of expression, as if it were his brother himself who was speaking.

"Sire, the honor and credit of such brilliant success is commonly awarded to the one under whose leadership it has been achieved. Monsieur d'Exmès, first of all, as modest as he is great, would freely consent that his name should be lost to sight in favor of mine. Nevertheless, I have deemed it proper to apprise your Majesty that the youth who hands you this letter has in fact been both the head and the arm of our enterprise, and that, except for him, Calais, where I am at this moment writing, would still be an English city. Monsieur d'Exmès has requested me to make this declaration, if I were willing, to the king's ear alone, — but to be sure to make it to him. It is that which I now do, in a voice loud with gratitude and joy.

"It was no more than my duty to give Monsieur d'Exmès this honorable certificate. The rest is for you, Sire. It is a right which I envy you, but which I cannot usurp, nor do I wish to do so. It seems to me that the gift of a reconquered city and the assurance of the integrity of a kingdom can hardly be paid for with presents.

"It would appear, however, from what Monsieur d'Exmès has told me, that your Majesty has in your hands a prize worthy of his achievement. I can well believe it, Sire ; but none but a king — yea, none but a great king like your Majesty — can bestow upon such a kingly exploit any reward approximate to its value.

"With this, Sire, I pray God to grant you a long life and a happy reign.

"And I am your Majesty's

"Most humble and obedient servant and subject,

"FRANÇOIS DE LORRAINE.

"Given at Calais, this 8th January, 1558."

When Charles de Lorraine had finished his reading and restored the letter to the king's hands, the movement of approbation, which expressed the restrained congratulation of the whole court, manifested itself anew, and once more made Gabriel's heart leap with joy, mightily moved as he was despite his apparent calmness. If respect for the king's presence had not imposed bounds upon their enthusiasm, the young conqueror would doubtless have been welcomed most warmly and with unstinted applause.

The king instinctively felt this general impulse ; moreover, he partook of it to some extent, and he could not refrain from saying to Gabriel, as if he had been the interpreter of the unexpressed feeling of all, —

“It is well, Monsieur ! You have done exceedingly well ! I earnestly hope that, as Monsieur de Guise gives me to understand, it may really be in our power to recompense you in a manner worthy of yourself and of me.”

“Sire,” replied Gabriel, “I have but one ambition, and your Majesty well knows what that —”

But as Henri made an expressive gesture, he hastened to add, —

“Pardon me, Sire, but my commissions are not yet fully executed.”

“What remains for you to do ?” asked the king.

“Sire, a letter from Madame de Castro for your Majesty.”

“From Madame de Castro ?” repeated Henri, eagerly.

With a quick and impulsive movement, he rose from his seat, and descended the steps which led to the royal platform, took Diane's letter with his own hands, and said in a low tone to Gabriel, —

“It is true, Monsieur, you not only restore a daughter

to the king, but a child to her father. I am doubly indebted to you. But let me read the letter."

As the courtiers, still motionless and mute, were respectfully awaiting the king's commands, Henri, feeling annoyed by this observant silence, added aloud, —

"Let me not restrain the expression of your gratification, Messieurs. I have no further news to give you; what remains is a private matter between myself and the messenger of our cousin De Guise. So you have only to discuss the glad intelligence, and congratulate yourselves upon it; and you are quite free now to do so, Messieurs."

The royal permission was quickly accepted; the party separated into groups and began to converse, and soon nothing was to be heard but the indistinct and confused buzzing which is always the combined result of a hundred different conversations in the same room.

Madame de Poitiers and the constable still thought of nothing but keeping watch upon the king and Gabriel.

With an interchange of speaking glances, they had communicated their mutual dread to one another; and Diane, by a slight and almost imperceptible movement, had drawn near her royal lover.

Henri did not notice the jealous couple, being entirely absorbed by his daughter's letter.

"Dear Diane! Poor dear Diane!" he was whispering, deeply moved.

When he had read the letter to the end, carried away by his kingly nature, whose first, spontaneous impulse was certainly liberal and just, he said to Gabriel, almost aloud, "Madame de Castro also commends her liberator to me, and it is just that she should. She tells me, Monsieur, that you not only rescued

her from captivity, but that you have also saved her honor."

"Oh, I but did my duty, Sire!" said Gabriel.

"Then must I not fail in mine," returned Henri, warmly. "It is for you to speak now, Monsieur. Tell me what you desire at our hands, *Monsieur le Vicomte de Montgommery*!"

CHAPTER XV.

JOY AND ANGUISH.

Monsieur le Vicomte de Montgomery! At that name which, when pronounced by the king, seemed to promise all that he wanted, Gabriel's heart fairly leaped for joy.

Henri clearly intended to pardon his father.

"See! he gives way," said Madame de Poitiers, beneath her breath to the constable, who had come to her side.

"Let us wait our opportunity," said Monsieur de Montmorency, without losing his self-possession.

"Sire," Gabriel was saying to the king, more easily moved as his custom was by hope than by fear, "Sire, it cannot be necessary for me to repeat to your Majesty what favor it is that I venture to ask of your kindness, your benevolence, — I may say, of your sense of justice. Having, I trust, accomplished what your Majesty asked of me, may I hope that your Majesty will condescend to grant my request? Have you forgotten your promise, or do you choose to redeem it?"

"Yes, Monsieur, I will redeem it, upon the condition that silence is to be maintained as we agreed," Henri replied, without hesitation.

"That condition, Sire, shall be exactly and rigorously observed; to that I pledge my honor anew," said Gabriel.

"Come hither, then, Monsieur," said the king.

Gabriel approached him. The Cardinal de Lorraine discreetly stepped aside; but Madame de Poitiers, who

was seated by Henri's side, did not stir, and was doubtless able to hear what was said, although the king lowered his voice so that it might reach Gabriel's ear alone.

However, this watchful surveillance did not disturb the king's determination, it must be confessed ; for he continued firmly, —

“Monsieur le Vicomte de Montgomery, you are a valiant subject whom I esteem and honor. Even when you are in possession of what you crave and have so nobly earned, we shall still be far from having discharged our indebtedness to you. However, take this ring, and present it to the governor of the Châtelet at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. He will be advised of your coming, and will deliver to you on the spot the object of your sublime and holy quest.”

Gabriel, who felt as if his knees were tottering from excess of joy, could restrain himself no longer, but fell at the king's feet.

“Ah, Sire !” said he, his breast heaving with emotion and his eyes wet with tears of happiness, “all the force and energy of which I may claim to have given proof I hereby devote to your Majesty's service for the rest of my life, as I would have devoted them to the service of my hatred if you had said ‘no.’”

“Really ?” said the king, smiling good-humoredly.

“Yes, Sire, I confess it ; and you ought to understand me, since you have pardoned my father. Yes, I believe I would have haunted your Majesty and your Majesty's children, as I will now defend and protect you and love you in them. Before God, who punishes all false swearing sooner or later, I will keep my oath of fidelity just as I would have kept my oath of vengeance.”

“Well, we shall see ! Rise, Monsieur,” said the king,

still smiling. "Calm yourself ; and to restore your self-control, tell me some details of this unhopèd-for success at Calais, of which it seems to me I shall never tire of hearing and speaking."

By this means Henri retained Gabriel by his side more than an hour, asking questions and listening, and making him repeat everything, even to the most minute details, a hundred times without seeming to grow weary.

Then he handed the young hero over to the tender mercies of the ladies, who were eager to have their turn at questioning him.

But in the first place the Cardinal de Lorraine, who was quite without information as to Gabriel's antecedents, and saw in him only his brother's friend and protégé, insisted upon presenting him to the queen.

Catherine de Médicis, in the presence of the whole court, was obliged to extend her thanks and congratulations to the man who had won so glorious a victory for the king. But she did it with noticeable coldness and reserve ; and the stern and contemptuous glance of her gray eyes gave the lie in a great measure to the words which fell from her lips, but which did not express the sentiments of her heart.

Gabriel, while thanking Catherine in respectful terms, was conscious of a freezing sensation at his heart when he heard her lying compliments, beneath which he seemed to discern, as he recalled the past, an ironical and hidden threat.

As he turned to withdraw after paying his respects to Catherine de Médicis, he saw a sight which was quite sufficient to justify his presentiment of evil.

He chanced to look toward the king, and saw with terror that Diane de Poitiers was conversing in whispers with him, with her wicked, sardonic smile. The more

Henri II. seemed to remonstrate, the more persistent she seemed to become.

Finally, she called the constable, who also talked with the king with much earnestness for a long time.

Gabriel saw all this from a distance. Not one of his enemies' movements escaped him, and he suffered the torments of the damned.

But just when his heart was being thus torn by conflicting emotions, the young queen-dauphine, Mary Stuart, approached him gayly, and overwhelmed him with compliments and questions.

Gabriel, despite his anxiety, exerted all his powers to reply to her.

"Why, it's magnificent!" said Mary, enthusiastically, "is it not, my dear Dauphin?" she added, addressing François, her youthful husband, who joined cordially in his wife's friendly words.

"What would one not do to deserve such kind words?" said Gabriel, whose distraught eyes never left the group composed of the king, Diane, and the constable.

"When I felt attracted to you by a strangely sympathetic feeling some time ago," continued Mary Stuart, with the charming grace that was peculiar to her, "it was doubtless because my heart foresaw that you would contribute this marvellous achievement to the glory of my dear uncle De Guise. Ah, I would that I, like the king, had the power of rewarding you! But a woman, alas! has neither titles nor honors at her disposal."

"Oh, but I really have all that I could ask for in the world!" said Gabriel. At the same time he was thinking to himself, "The king no longer replies, he listens simply."

"Well, then," rejoined Mary Stuart, "if I had the power, I would create desires in you so that I might

gratify them. But at this moment, see, I have nothing but this bunch of violets which the gardener at the Tournelles just sent me as a great rarity after the late frost. With the permission of Monseigneur le Dauphin, I will give you these flowers as a memento of the day. Will you accept them?"

"Oh, Madame!" cried Gabriel, kissing respectfully the fair hand that offered them.

"Flowers," continued Mary Stuart, dreamily, "offer us their sweet odor when we are glad, and comfort us in times of sorrow. I may be very unhappy some day, but I shall never be altogether so as long as I am allowed to have flowers near me. It is understood of course, Monsieur d'Exmès, that to you, in this hour of good fortune and triumph, I offer them only for their perfume."

"Who knows," said Gabriel, shaking his head sadly, — "who knows if I, triumphant and fortunate as you say, do not need them rather to comfort and console me?"

His gaze, even while he was speaking, was still fastened upon the king, who for the moment seemed to be thinking deeply, and yielding to the arguments always more and more earnest of Madame de Poitiers and the constable.

Gabriel could but tremble at the thought that the favorite must have overheard the king's promise, and that his father and himself were undoubtedly the subject of their conversation.

The young queen-dauphine left him, with some gentle raillery upon his preoccupation.

At this moment Admiral de Coligny came up to him, and, in his turn, offered his hearty felicitations upon his success in maintaining and surpassing at Calais the renown he had won at St. Quentin.

The poor fellow had never seemed to be so petted by

fate or more worthy of envy than when he was enduring such tortures as he had never before imagined.

"You are quite as successful," said the admiral, "in gaining victories as in minimizing the effects of defeat. I am more than proud to have foreseen your extraordinary merit, and my only regret is that I was not present to share with you the dangers of this noble feat of arms, so fortunate for you and so glorious for France."

"Other occasions will not be lacking, Monsieur l'Amiral," said Gabriel.

"I am much inclined to doubt it," said Coligny, with some sadness. "May God grant that if we do ever meet again upon a battle-field, it may not be on opposing sides!"

"May Heaven forefend, indeed!" exclaimed Gabriel, earnestly; "what mean you by those words, Monsieur l'Amiral?"

"Four adherents of the Religion have been burned alive during the last month," replied Coligny. "The Reformers, who are growing every day in numbers and in power, will eventually grow weary of this hateful and iniquitous persecution. Even now two armies might be formed, I fear, from the two parties into which France is divided."

"Well?" said Gabriel, inquiringly.

"Well, Monsieur d'Exmès, despite the walk which we took together to the Rue St. Jacques, you retained your freedom of action, and only bound yourself at your own discretion. But now you seem to me to be too high in favor at court, and justly so, not to be enrolled in the king's army, as against the heresy, as it is called."

"I think that you are mistaken, Monsieur l'Amiral," said Gabriel, whose eyes never left the king. "I have every reason to think, on the other hand, that I shall very soon have the right to march in the ranks of the oppressed against the oppressors."

"What! What do you mean?" asked the admiral. "You are pale, Gabriel, and your voice falters. Pray, what is the matter?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing, Monsieur l'Amiral! But I must leave you. *Au revoir!* We shall soon meet again."

Gabriel had observed an acquiescent gesture made by the king; whereupon Monsieur de Montmorency had left the room at once, darting a triumphant glance at Diane as he went.

However, the reception came to an end a few moments later; and Gabriel, as he was bowing to the king on taking his leave, ventured to say, —

"Sire, until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow, Monsieur," the king replied.

But as he spoke Henri avoided Gabriel's eye; he even turned away, nor did he smile any longer, while Madame de Poitiers's face was beaming.

Gabriel, whom every one thought to see radiant with joy and hope, withdrew with grief and terror at his heart.

All the evening he haunted the neighborhood of the Châtelet.

He regained his courage to some slight extent when time passed without his seeing Monsieur de Montmorency leave the prison.

Then he felt the royal signet on his finger, and recalled the solemn words of Henri II., which left no chance for doubt, and which could not conceal a deception, — "The object of your sublime and holy ambition shall be restored to you."

Courage! The night which still separated Gabriel from the decisive moment seemed more than a year long.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES.

WHAT Gabriel thought and what he suffered during those mortal hours God only knows; for when he returned to his own house he said nothing to his retainers, nor even to his nurse. From that moment began an absorbed and concentrated dumb life, so to speak, — a life all action, and very sparing of words, to which he devoted himself strictly from this time on, as if he had tacitly taken vows of silence.

Consequently, the disappointed hopes, energetic resolutions, projects of love or vengeance, — everything, in short, that Gabriel thought or dreamed, or vowed in his own heart that night remained a secret between his noble heart and his God.

Not till eight o'clock could he present himself at the Châtelet, with the ring given him by the king, — the talisman which was to open all the doors, not to him alone, but to his father.

Until six in the morning Gabriel remained alone in his room, and refused to speak with any person.

At that hour he descended to the first floor, all clad and equipped as if for a long journey. He had asked the nurse the night before to give him all the money she could get together.

The people of his household were most earnest in offering their services to him. The four volunteers who had come in his suite from Calais were foremost in placing

themselves at his disposal ; but he thanked them most heartily, and dismissed them, retaining only the page André, the latest comer, and his nurse Aloyse.

"My good Aloyse," he began, "I am expecting from day to day the arrival of two guests, friends of mine, from Calais, — Jean Peuquoy and his wife Babette. It may be, Aloyse, that I shall not be here to receive them ; but even in my absence, — nay, especially in my absence, — I beg you, Aloyse, to make them welcome, and treat them as if they were my brother and sister. Babette already knows you well from having heard me speak of you a hundred times. She will trust in you as a daughter in her mother ; so I entreat you, in the name of your affection for me, to show her a mother's tenderness and indulgence."

"I promise you I will, Monseigneur," said the kind-hearted nurse, simply ; "and you know that from me those words are sufficient. Have no anxiety about your guests, for they shall want for nothing in the way of bodily comfort."

"Thanks, Aloyse," said Gabriel, pressing her hand. "Now for you, André !" said he to the page whom Madame Diane de Castro had given him. "I have certain last commissions of grave importance which I must confide to a trusty hand, and I have selected you, André, to execute them, because you take the place of my faithful Martin-Guerre."

"I am at your command, Monseigneur," said André.

"Listen carefully to what I say," continued Gabriel. "In an hour I shall leave this house alone ; if I return in a short time, you will have nothing to do, — or rather, I shall have different orders to give you. But it is possible that I may not return, — not to-day, that is, nor to-morrow, nor for a long time to come —"

The nurse, in despair, raised her clasped hands heavenward imploringly. André interrupted his master.

"Pardon, Monseigneur ! you say that you may not return here for a long time ?"

"Yes, André."

"And am I not to accompany you ?—and perhaps not to see you again for a long while ?" added André, who seemed both sorrowful and embarrassed at this information.

"That may well be, no doubt," said Gabriel.

"But Madame de Castro," rejoined the page, "before I quitted her intrusted to my care a message, a letter for Monseigneur—"

"And you have never yet given it to me, André ?" said Gabriel, warmly.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur," André replied ; "I was instructed not to deliver it unless you were to return from the Louvre either very sorrowful or in a state of angry excitement. Only in such case Madame Diane told me to give Monsieur d'Exmès the letter, which contained what might be a warning to him and perhaps a consolation."

"Give it me, quickly, give it me !" cried Gabriel. "Advice and consolation could not arrive more opportunely, I fear."

André drew from his doublet a letter very carefully wrapped up, and handed it to his new master ; Gabriel hurriedly broke the seal, and withdrew to a window recess to read it.

This is what he read :—

MY FRIEND, — Amid all the anguish and all the dreams of this last night, which separates me from you, perhaps forever, the most terrible thought which has torn my heart is this :—

It may be that, in carrying out the momentous and formidable duty which you are about to undertake with such brave heart, you may come in contact, nay, even in conflict, with the

king. It may be that the unforeseen issue of your struggle will force you to hate the king, or even incite you to visit your wrath upon him.

Gabriel, I do not yet know if he is my father, but I do know that he has until now cherished me as his child. The mere dread of your vengeance makes me shudder while I write, and its accomplishment would be my death-blow.

And yet the duty which depends upon my own birth may perhaps compel me to think as you do ; perhaps I, like you, may have to avenge him whom I shall hereafter know as my father upon him who has hitherto been a father to me, — frightful thought !

But while doubt and darkness still hide the solution of this terrible enigma from my sight, while I am still ignorant on which side my hatred belongs and on which my love, Gabriel, I implore you, — and if you have loved me, you will obey me, Gabriel, — respect the person of the king.

I can reason now, without passion at least, if not without emotion ; and I feel, yes, I am sure, that it is not for man to punish man, but for God.

So, dear friend, whatever happens, do not try to take from the hands of God the prerogative of chastisement, even to strike a criminal.

If he whom I have until now called my father is guilty, and being only human, he may be, do not be his judge, far less his executioner. Have no fear ; the Lord will judge him, and the Lord will avenge you more terribly than you could do yourself. Leave your cause fearlessly to His justice.

Unless God makes you the involuntary and, in some sort, fatal instrument of His pitiless justice ; unless He makes use of your hand in your own despite ; unless you strike the blow unwillingly and without wishing it, — Gabriel, do not constitute yourself his judge, and above all things do not with your own hand carry out the sentence.

Do this for love of me, my friend. In mercy's name I ask it ; and it is the last prayer and the last despairing cry to your heart from

DIANE DE CASTRO.

Gabriel read the letter twice from beginning to end ; but meanwhile, André and the nurse could detect no sign of emotion on his pale face save the mournful smile which had become so familiar there.

When he had refolded Diane's letter and hidden it in his breast, he remained silent for a time, with bent head and in deep thought.

Then, as if awaking from a dream, —

"It is well," he said aloud. "The orders I have to give you, André, are not changed ; and if, as I was saying, I do not soon return, whether you learn anything about me, or whether you do not hear my name mentioned, whatever happens or does not happen, remember my words, — this is what you are to do."

"I am listening, Monseigneur," said André, "and I will obey you in every detail ; for I love you, and am your devoted servant."

"Madame de Castro," said Gabriel, "will be at Paris within a few days. Make arrangements to be informed of her arrival as soon as possible."

"It will be very easy to do that, Monseigneur."

"Go to her at once if you can," continued Gabriel, "and deliver this sealed package from me. Take especial care not to lose it, André, although it contains nothing of value to any one else, — a lady's veil, nothing more. But no matter ! Do you yourself deliver this veil to her in person, and say to her —"

"What shall I say, Monseigneur ?" asked André, seeing that his master was hesitating.

"No, say nothing to her," Gabriel resumed, "except that she is free, and that I give back to her all her promises, even that of which this veil is the pledge."

"Is that all, Monseigneur ?" asked the page.

"That is all," said Gabriel. "But, André, if nothing

has been heard of me, and you see that Madame de Castro is a little anxious, you may add — But for what good? No, add nothing, André. Ask her, if you choose, to take you back into her service. Otherwise, come back here and await my return.”

“That is to say, Monseigneur, that you will surely come back?” asked the nurse, with tears in her eyes. “But when you said that perhaps we should not hear any more of you —”

“Perhaps that would be best, dear Mother,” said Gabriel, “that you should hear nothing of me. In any event, hope for the best, and await my return.”

“Hope, when you have disappeared from all eyes, even from those of your poor nurse! Ah, it is very hard to hope!” replied Aloyse.

“But who said that I should disappear?” returned Gabriel. “Ought I not to provide for every contingency? For my own part, never fear; whatever precautions I may take I rely upon embracing you again very soon, Aloyse, with all the gratitude of my heart. That is most probable; for Providence is a kind and loving mother to him who implores her protection. Did I not begin, too, by saying to André that all my injunctions to him would probably be useless and void in the almost certain event of my return to-day?”

“May God bless you for those dear words, Monseigneur!” cried poor Aloyse, moved beyond expression.

“Have you no other orders to give, Monseigneur, to be executed during your absence? — which may God make of brief duration!” asked André.

“Wait a moment,” said Gabriel, as a thought seemed suddenly to occur to him. Seating himself at a table, he wrote the following letter to Coligny:—

MONSIEUR L'AMIRAL, — I propose to instruct myself in the principles of your religion, and you may count me as one of you after to-day.

Whatever may be the instrument of my conversion, whether your persuasive words or some other motive, I, nevertheless, devote irrevocably to your cause and that of the oppressed religion my heart, my life, and my sword.

Your very humble companion and good friend,

GABRIEL DE MONTGOMMERY.

“Deliver this as well, if I fail to return,” said Gabriel, handing the letter sealed to Andre. “And now, my dear friends, I must say adieu, and leave you. The time has come.”

Half an hour later Gabriel knocked with trembling hand at the great door of the Châtelet.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SECRET PRISONER.

MONSIEUR DE SALVOISON, the governor of the Châtelet who had received Gabriel at his first visit, had recently died, and the new governor was Monsieur de Sazerac.

It was to him that the young man was escorted. Anxiety, with its iron hand, had seized poor Gabriel's throat so tightly that he could not utter a single word ; but he silently presented the ring which the king had given him to the governor.

Monsieur de Sazerac bowed gravely.

"I was expecting you, Monsieur," he said ; "I received an hour ago the order in which you are interested. My instructions are, upon presentation of this ring, and without asking any other explanation from you, to deliver to you the nameless prisoner who has been detained for many years in the Châtelet under the designation of Number 21. Am I right, Monsieur ?"

"Yes, yes, Monsieur," replied Gabriel, eagerly ; for hope returning had restored his voice. "And this order, Monsieur le Gouverneur ?"

"I am ready to execute, Monsieur."

"Oh, oh ! Can it really be ?" said Gabriel, shaking from head to foot.

"It surely is so," replied Monsieur de Sazerac, with an accent in which an indifferent person might have detected a shade of sadness and bitterness.

But Gabriel was too distracted and excited by his joy. "Ah, it is true, then !" cried he. "I do not dream. My eyes are open. My insane terrors were dreams ; and you are really going to deliver this prisoner to me, Monsieur ? Oh, I thank thee, my God ! And thanks to thee, Sire ! But come, let us go quickly, Monsieur, I beseech you."

He took two or three steps as if to lead the way before Monsieur de Sazerac ; but his strength, so vigorous and inexhaustible in the face of suffering and danger, failed him in the excess of his joy. He was obliged to stop for a moment, for his heart was beating so violently and so fast that he thought he should suffocate.

Poor human nature was too weak to undergo such a tumult of conflicting emotions.

The almost despaired-of realization of such far-off hopes and the end and aim of his whole life, — the goal of his superhuman efforts suddenly attained ; gratitude to the loyal king and the just God ; filial love at last to be satisfied ; another passion, still more ardent, to be at last decided for better or worse, — such a multitude of feelings, all aroused and excited at the same moment, made poor Gabriel's heart overflow.

But amid this inexpressible whirl of emotions and almost insane happiness, his least confused thoughts framed themselves into something like a hymn of thanksgiving to Henri II., to whom he owed this delirium of joy.

Gabriel repeated over and over again in his grateful heart his oath to devote his whole life to this true-hearted king and his children. How, in God's name, could he for one moment have doubted so noble and excellent a monarch !

But at last, shaking off his ecstatic mood, he said to the governor, who had stopped beside him, —

"Pardon, Monsieur! Pardon this weakness which overcame me for a moment. Joy, you see, is sometimes too heavy a load to carry."

"Oh, do not apologize, Monsieur, I beg!" replied the governor, in a deep voice.

This time Gabriel noticed the tone in which he spoke, and fixed his eyes upon him.

Nowhere could a more kindly, open, and honest face be found. Everything about this prison-governor indicated sincerity and kindness of heart.

Strangely enough, the emotion which at that moment was depicted upon the good man's features, while he observed Gabriel's exuberant happiness, was heartfelt compassion.

Gabriel caught the singular expression, and every vestige of color fled from his cheeks as a presentiment of evil laid hold upon his heart.

But such was his nature that this ill-defined dread, suddenly intruding upon his happiness, served only to impart renewed energy to his valiant soul; and standing proudly erect, he said to the governor, —

"Come, Monsieur, let us go. I am strong again now, and quite ready."

Gabriel and Monsieur de Sazerac thereupon went down into the prison, preceded by a valet carrying a torch.

Gabriel found gloomy souvenirs at every step, and recognized at the windings of the corridors and on the staircases the dark walls which he had seen before, and the sombre impressions which he had experienced on his former visit without being able to explain them.

When they reached the iron door of the dungeon in which he had, with so strange a feeling at his heart, visited the haggard, dumb prisoner, he stopped abruptly.

"He is there," said he, with beating heart.

But Monsieur de Sazerac sorrowfully shook his head.

"No," he replied, "he is no longer there."

"What!" ejaculated Gabriel. "No longer there! Are you mocking me, Monsieur?"

"Oh, Monsieur!" said the governor, in mild reproach.

A cold sweat moistened Gabriel's brow.

"Pardon, pardon," he murmured. "But what do your words imply? Oh, tell me; speak quickly!"

"I am very much grieved to inform you, Monsieur, that last evening the secret prisoner confined here was transferred to a floor below this."

"Ah!" said Gabriel, bewildered. "Why was that, pray?"

"He had been warned, Monsieur, as I think you know, that if he should so much as make an attempt to speak to any person whatsoever, if he uttered the slightest exclamation, and muttered a name, even in response to a question, he would be immediately transferred to a deeper and more terrible and deadly dungeon than his own."

"I know all that," muttered Gabriel, in so low a tone that it did not reach the governor's ear.

"Once before, Monsieur," continued Monsieur de Sazerac, "the prisoner had ventured to disobey that order, and it was then that he was transferred to this dungeon which is before us, and which you have seen,—harsh and cruel enough, God knows. It seems, Monsieur, or so I have been told, that you were informed when you visited the prison before of the doom of eternal silence which he was compelled to undergo, even though alive."

"Yes, yes," said Gabriel, almost insane with impatient dread. "Well, Monsieur?"

"Yesterday evening," continued Monsieur de Sazerac,

with sorrow and commiseration in his tones, "just before the outer doors were closed for the night, a man came to the Châtelet, — a man of eminence, whose name I cannot mention."

"No matter ; go on !" exclaimed Gabriel.

"This man," pursued the governor, "gave orders that he should be taken to the cell of Number 21. I accompanied him alone. He spoke to the prisoner without at first obtaining a reply, and I hoped that the old man would come out triumphantly from this ordeal ; for full half an hour he maintained an immovable silence in the face of all the importunities and provocations that were showered upon him."

Gabriel breathed a deep sigh, and raised his eyes to heaven, but said not a word to interrupt the governor's dolorous recital.

"Unfortunately, the prisoner at last, upon something which was whispered in his ear, rose to a sitting posture, tears gushed from his stony eyes, and he spoke, Monsieur. I was instructed to narrate all these particulars to you, so that you might the more readily believe my word as a gentleman when I add, 'The prisoner spoke.' I declare to you, with sorrow, but upon my honor, that I myself heard him."

"And then?" asked Gabriel, brokenly.

"Thereupon," replied Monsieur de Sazerac, "I was required, in spite of my earnest remonstrances and my entreaties, to fulfil the inhuman duty which my office imposed upon me, — to obey a power higher than mine, and which would have been at no loss to find more willing instruments had I refused, — and to cause the prisoner to be transferred by his dumb jailer to the dungeon beneath this."

"The dungeon beneath this !" cried Gabriel. "Ah,

let us go quickly, for I am bringing him deliverance at last !”

The governor sadly shook his head ; but Gabriel saw not the motion, for he was already rushing down the slippery and dilapidated steps which led to the lowest depths of the gloomy prison.

Monsieur de Sazerac took the torch from the hands of the attendant, whom he dismissed with a motion of his hand, and followed Gabriel, with his handkerchief over his mouth.

At every step the air grew fouler and more suffocating. When they reached the foot of the staircase they were fairly gasping for breath, and the feeling was instinctive that nothing could live more than a few moments in that atmosphere, save the unclean creatures they were crushing beneath their feet.

But Gabriel never thought of that. He took from the governor's trembling hands the rusty key that he handed him, and opening the heavy, worm-eaten door, rushed headlong into the dungeon.

By the light of the torch a form could be distinguished in a corner stretched upon a heap of foul straw.

Gabriel threw himself upon the body, drew it from the corner, and tried to restore it to life, crying, —

“Father, father !”

Monsieur de Sazerac fairly shook with horror at that cry.

The arms and the head of the old man fell back inert and lifeless under Gabriel's caressing hands.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE COMTE DE MONTGOMMERY.

GABRIEL, still kneeling beside the lifeless mass, raised his pale, bewildered countenance, and cast a glance of ominous tranquillity around him. He seemed to be questioning himself and pondering deeply; and his almost unnatural calm touched and alarmed Monsieur de Sazerac more than all the outcry and sobbing in the world would have done.

Suddenly, as if the idea that life might not be extinct had just occurred to him, he hurriedly placed his hand over the heart of the corpse.

For a moment or two he felt and listened eagerly.

"Nothing!" he then said in a firm but gentle voice, which was terrible for those very qualities; "nothing! — the heart no longer beats, but the flesh is still warm."

"What a marvellously strong constitution!" the governor muttered; "he might have lived for a long time to come."

All this time the eyes had remained open. Gabriel leaned over and closed them with reverent touch. Then he imprinted a respectful and loving kiss, the first and the last, upon the poor wasted lids, which had been wet with so many bitter tears.

"Monsieur," observed Monsieur de Sazerac, hoping to divert Gabriel from his terrifying contemplation of the inert body before him, "if the deceased was dear to you —"

"Dear to me, Monsieur!" Gabriel interrupted; "why, yes, — he was my father."

"Very well, Monsieur, if you desire to pay the last sad honors to his memory, I am directed to allow you to remove the body from this place."

"Ah, indeed!" replied Gabriel, with the same terrible calmness. "He is strictly just with me, then, and is keeping his word to me with great exactitude, I must confess. You must know, Monsieur le Gouverneur, that he swore to restore my father to me. He is restored to me: behold him! I recognize the fact that there was no undertaking to restore him to me alive."

He laughed a harsh, unpleasant laugh.

"Come, courage!" rejoined Monsieur de Sazerac. "It is time now to say adieu to him for whom you weep."

"I am doing so, as you see, Monsieur."

"Yes, but I mean that you really must leave this place at once. The air that we breathe here is not fit for human lungs, and a longer stay in this poisonous miasma might be very dangerous."

"Here is a proof of it before our eyes," said Gabriel, pointing to the body of his father.

"Come, come, we must be going!" replied the governor, taking the poor fellow's arm to force him away.

"Yes, yes, I will follow you," said Gabriel; "but for God's sake, leave me here a few moments longer!"

Monsieur de Sazerac made a sign of assent, and withdrew as far as the door, where the air was less noxious and heavy.

Gabriel, on his knees by the side of the dead man, and with head bent and hands hanging at his side, remained mute and motionless for some moments, praying or dreaming.

What said he to his dead father? Did he ask those

lips, which Death's pitiless finger had closed too soon, for the solution of the enigma he was trying to unravel? Did he swear to the sainted victim that he would avenge him in this world, independently of God's vengeance in the world to come? Did he scan those already decomposing features, to conjecture what sort of man had been this father of his whom he now saw for the second time, and to dream of the peaceful and happy life that might have been in store for him under his watchful care? Did his thoughts dwell upon the past or the future; upon the affairs of this world, or the divine power of the Lord; upon vengeance or forgiveness?

The subject of this sombre communion between a dead father and his son remained forever a secret between Gabriel and his God.

Four or five minutes had passed; and breathing had become a painful and laborious task to these two men who had descended to these pestilential depths, — one in the performance of a holy duty, and the other led by an instinct of humanity.

"Again, I beg you to come away," said the kind-hearted governor to Gabriel. "It is full time that we should go up into the air."

"I am coming," said Gabriel, "I am coming."

He took his father's icy hand in his, and kissed it tenderly; he leaned over his damp and decomposing forehead, and left a kiss there, too.

All this passed without a tear. Alas! he could not weep.

"*Au revoir!*" said he; "*au revoir!*"

He rose with the same wonderfully calm and steadfast bearing and expression, whatever passions and emotions may have been rending his heart and soul.

He cast a last look at his father, and wafted a last

caress to him, then followed Monsieur de Sazerac with slow and measured step.

On their way to the upper regions he asked to be shown the dark, cold cell where the prisoner had passed so many years of sorrow and despair, and which he, Gabriel, had once entered without embracing his father.

He spent a few moments there of silent meditation, and eager, though hopeless, interest.

When he and the governor had ascended to light and life once more, Monsieur de Sazerac could not repress a shudder of horror and pity as the daylight fell upon the features of the young man, whom he invited to his own room ; for his chestnut locks had become silvery white.

After a short interval he said to him, in a voice trembling with emotion, —

“Is there nothing I can do for you now, Monsieur? You have but to ask, and I shall be more than happy to gratify any wish of yours with which my duties do not conflict.”

“Monsieur,” replied Gabriel, “you told me that I should be allowed to render the last honors to the dead. This evening I shall send some bearers here ; and if you will kindly have the body placed in a coffin, and allow them to take it away, they will see that the prisoner is interred in the tomb of his ancestors.”

“It shall be done, Monsieur,” replied Monsieur de Sazerac ; “but I must warn you that one condition was imposed upon the granting of this privilege.”

“What was that, Monsieur?” asked Gabriel, coldly.

“That you should, in accordance with your agreement, cause no scandal or disturbance.”

“I will keep that promise, too,” said Gabriel. “The men will come by night, and without any knowledge as to the burden they are carrying will transport the body

to the Rue des Jardins St. Paul, to the funeral vault of the counts of —”

“Pardon, Monsieur!” the governor interposed hurriedly; “I do not know the prisoner’s name, nor is it my wish or my duty to know it. I have been compelled by the obligations of my office and the word I have given to maintain silence with you upon many matters; and you should be quite as reserved with me.”

“But I for my part have nothing to conceal,” replied Gabriel, proudly. “It is only the guilty who wish to cover their tracks.”

“While you are only one of the unfortunates,” said the governor. “After all, that is not much better, is it?”

“Besides,” continued Gabriel, “I have already surmised the matters about which you have kept silence; indeed, I could tell you myself. For instance, this powerful individual who came here last evening, and who wished to talk with the prisoner so that he might make him speak — well, I could tell you almost the exact words of the talisman which finally induced my father to break silence, — the silence whereon depended the feeble remnant of his life, for which he had up to that time struggled bravely with his murderers.”

“What! you say that you know?” said Monsieur de Sazerac, in amazement.

“I am sure of it,” was Gabriel’s reply. “The individual in question said to the poor old man, ‘Your son lives!’ or, perhaps, ‘Your son has covered himself with renown!’ or, again, ‘Your son is coming to set you free!’ He spoke to him of his son, at all events — the villain!”

The governor let fall an exclamation of astonishment.

“And at the mention of his son,” continued Gabriel, “the wretched father, who had up to that time succeeded in restraining himself even before his most implacable

foe, could not overcome a joyful impulse, and though he had remained dumb under all the provocation of his hatred, cried for joy when his love was awakened. Tell me, Monsieur, do I say truly?"

The governor bent his head without replying.

"It must be true, since you deny it not," Gabriel continued. "You can see how fruitless was your endeavor to conceal from me what this influential man said to the wretched captive. And as for the name of this all-powerful person, it was in vain also for you to pass that over in silence. Do you wish that I should name him to you?"

"Oh, Monsieur, Monsieur!" cried Monsieur de Sazerac, earnestly. "We are alone, it is true, but be careful. Are you not afraid?"

"I have already told you," said Gabriel, "that I have nothing to fear. Well, then, Monsieur, this man's name was Monsieur le Connétable, Duc de Montmorency. The executioner's mask has fallen off, you see."

"Oh, Monsieur!" ejaculated the governor, looking fearfully around.

"As to the prisoner's name and mine," pursued Gabriel, calmly, "those you do not know. But there is no reason why I should not tell them to you. Moreover, you may have already met me, and may meet me again during your life; then, too, you have been kind and considerate in this supreme moment of my existence; and when you hear my name in men's mouths, as may very well be the case within a few months, it will be well that you should know that he of whom they are talking is the same whom you have made your debtor to-day."

"I shall be most happy," said Monsieur de Sazerac, "to learn that fate has not continued to be so relentless toward you."

"Oh, such questions have no more interest for me!" said Gabriel, gravely. "But, in any event, let me tell you that since my father's death last night in this prison I am the Comte de Montgommery."

The governor of the Châtelet stood as if turned to stone, and could find no word to say.

"And now, adieu, Monsieur," added Gabriel; "adieu. Accept my warmest thanks; may God protect you!"

He saluted Monsieur de Sazerac, and left the gloomy precincts of the prison with a firm step.

But when the fresh air and the bright light of day recalled him to himself, he stayed his steps a moment, dizzy and tottering. The actuality of life came too suddenly upon him as he emerged from that hell.

However, as the passers-by began to look askance at him, he asserted his will, and walked away from the deathly spot.

In the first place he bent his steps to a lonely corner of the Place de Grève. There he took out his tablets, and wrote these words to his nurse:—

MY GOOD ALOYSE,— Do not expect me, for I shall not return to-day. I must be alone for a time, to move about, and think, and wait. But have no anxiety about me; I shall surely see you again.

This evening arrange matters so that everything will be quiet in the house at an early hour. You alone must sit up, and open the door to four men who will knock at the great door a little before midnight, when the street is deserted.

I ask you personally to conduct these men, laden as they will be with a sorrowful but priceless burden, to the family burial-vault; point out to them the open tomb in which they must place him whom they will have in charge, and watch carefully the preparations for the interment; then, when they are at an end, give each of the men four golden crowns, guide them back to the door without noise, and return at once to the

tomb to kneel and pray as you would for your master and your father.

I will pray also at the same hour, but far away from the spot. It must be so. I feel that the sight of that tomb might excite me to reckless and violent deeds, and I must ask counsel rather from God in solitude.

Au revoir, dear Aloyse, *au revoir*. Remind André of his commission to Madame de Castro, and do not yourself forget my guests, Jean and Babette Peuquoy. *Au revoir*, and God be with you!

GABRIEL DE M.

Having written this letter, Gabriel sought and found four men of the people, — laborers, that is to say.

He gave each of them four crowns in advance, and promised them as many more. In order to earn their wages, one of them was to take a letter to its address immediately; then, all four were to present themselves at the Châtelet a little before ten that same evening, to receive at the governor's hands a coffin, and convey it secretly and silently to the Rue des Jardins St. Paul, to the same house to which the letter was addressed.

The poor workmen overwhelmed Gabriel with their gratitude, and as they left him, in high glee over the windfall, they promised to fulfil his orders to the letter.

"Well, I have at least made four honest fellows happy," said Gabriel, with sorrowful pleasure, if we may be allowed the expression.

Then he pursued a course which led him out of the city, and on his way he passed the Louvre. Wrapped in his cloak, and with arms folded upon his breast, he stood for some moments gazing at the royal abode.

"Now it is for us two to settle our account," he muttered, with a glance of defiance. He resumed his journey, and as he went along there recurred to his memory the

horoscope which Master Nostradamus had written long ago for the Comte de Montgomery, and which, in the master's own words, he had found by a remarkable coincidence to be exactly appropriate for his son, according to the laws of astrology, —

“ En joûte, en amour, cettuy touchera
Le front du roy,
Et cornes ou bien trou sanglant mettra
Au front du roy.
Mais le veuille ou non, toujours blessera
Le front du roy.
Enfin, l'aimera, puis, las ! le tuera
Dame du roy.”

Gabriel reflected that that curious prediction had already been fulfilled from point to point in his father's case ; for the Comte de Montgomery in his youth had wounded King François I. in the face with a burning brand, and had afterward been King Henri's rival in love, and had been slain only the evening before by that very “lady of the king,” who had loved him.

Up to that time Gabriel also had been loved by a queen, — Catherine de Médicis.

Would his destiny too be realized to the end ? Would his vengeance or his fate decree that he should overthrow and wound the king “in the tilting-field” ?

If that should happen, it would be a matter of indifference to Gabriel whether the king's lady who had loved him should slay him sooner or later.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE KNIGHT-ERRANT.

POOR Aloyse, whose life for many years had been passed in waiting, in solitude, and in suffering, again sat two or three endless hours at the window, to see if she could not catch a glimpse of her beloved young master.

When the laborer to whom Gabriel had intrusted the letter knocked at the door, Aloyse rushed to open it. "News at last!" she thought.

News at last, indeed, and terrible news! Aloyse, after the first few lines, felt a mist coming before her eyes, and to conceal her emotion hastened to return to her own room, where she finished with much difficulty the perusal of the fatal missive, the tears streaming from her eyes the while.

However, hers was a stout heart and a valiant soul; so she collected her energies, wiped away her tears, and left her room to say to the messenger, —

"It is well! Until this evening, when I shall expect you and your companions."

André the page questioned her anxiously, but she bade him wait till the following day for answers to his questions. Until then she had enough to think of and to do.

When evening had fallen, she sent the people of the household to bed in good season.

"The master will surely not return to-night," she told them.

But when she was left alone she thought, —

“Ah! the master will return; but, alas! it will be the old master, not the young one, — it will be the dead, and not the living. For what body would he command me to see entombed in the vault of the counts of Montgomery, unless it were that of the Comte de Montgomery himself? Oh, my noble lord, for whom my poor Perrot died, have you at last gone to join your faithful servant? But have you carried your secret with you to the tomb? Oh, mystery of mysteries! — mystery and terror everywhere! But no matter! Though I know and understand nothing, though I hope not, still will I obey; it is my duty, and I will do it. Oh, my God!”

Aloyse's sorrowful revery ended in a fervent prayer. It is the habit of the human soul, when the burden of life becomes too heavy to bear, to seek help and shelter in God's bosom.

About eleven o'clock, the streets being then entirely deserted, a loud knocking was heard at the great door. Aloyse started and turned pale, but summoning all her fortitude, she took a torch in her hand, and descended to admit the men who bore the sad burden. She received with a deep and respectful salute the master who thus returned to his own house after such a long absence. Then she said to the bearers, “Follow me with as little noise as possible. I will show you the way.” Going in advance with her light, she led them to the funeral vault.

When they had reached the spot, the bearers placed the coffin in one of the open tombs, and put the cover of black marble in place; then the poor fellows, who had been taught by suffering to look with holy awe upon death, removed their caps, and falling on their knees, offered a short prayer for the soul of the unknown dead.

When they had risen, the nurse led them back in silence, and on the threshold slipped into the hand of one of them the sum Gabriel had promised ; whereupon they vanished like dumb spectres, without having uttered a single word.

Aloyse returned to the tomb, and passed the rest of the night on her knees, praying and weeping.

The next morning André found her pale but calm ; she said to him simply, —

“My child, we must never lose hope ; but it is useless for us to expect Monsieur le Vicomte d’Exmès any longer. So you must set about executing the commissions with which he charged you in case he did not return at once.”

“Very well,” said the page, sorrowfully. “I will start at once then to go and meet Madame de Castro.”

“In the name of your absent master, I thank you for your zeal, André,” said Aloyse.

The boy did as he promised, and set out the same day.

He inquired for the noble traveller he was seeking at every halting-place on the road, but did not meet her until he reached Amiens.

Diane de Castro had but just arrived at that city, with the escort with which the Duc de Guise had furnished her as the daughter of Henri II. She had stopped to rest a few hours at the house of Monsieur de Thuré, the governor of the place.

As soon as Diane espied the page, she changed color ; but controlling herself with an effort, she made a sign to him to follow her into the next room. When they were alone, she asked him, —

“Well, André, what have you for me ?”

“Nothing but this, Madame,” the page replied, handing her the package containing the veil.

"Ah, it is not the ring!" cried Diane.

That was as far as her observation went at first; but she soon collected herself somewhat, and a prey to that insatiable curiosity which makes the unfortunate eager to anticipate the extremity of their sorrow, she eagerly interrogated André.

"Did Monsieur d'Exmès intrust you, besides this, with no writing for me?"

"No, Madame."

"But surely you must have some verbal message to give me?"

"Alas!" the page replied, shaking his head, "Monsieur d'Exmès said only that he gave you back all your promises, Madame, even to that of which this veil is the pledge; he added nothing to that."

"But under what circumstances did he send you to me? Had you given him my letter? What said he after reading it? When he put this package in your hands, what did he say? Speak, André! You are devoted and faithful, I know, and my whole future depends on your answers; the very least word may serve as a guide and consolation to me in the darkness which surrounds me."

"Madame," said André, "I will tell you all that I know; but that all is very little."

"Oh, go on, speak, pray speak!" cried Madame de Castro.

André thereupon told her faithfully — omitting nothing, for Gabriel had not enjoined secrecy upon him — all that his master before his departure had charged Aloyse and himself to do, in the event that his absence were prolonged. He told of the young man's hesitation and his bitter suffering; that after reading Diane's letter he had seemed at first to be on the point of speaking, but had

ended by saying nothing except a few vague and indefinite words. In fact, André kept his promise, and forgot nothing, — not a gesture, or a half-uttered word, or a failure to speak. But he had said truly that he knew scarcely anything, and his story only contributed to Diane's doubt and uncertainty.

She looked mournfully at the black veil, the lone messenger from her lover, and the true symbol of her destiny. It seemed as if she were questioning its sombre folds, and seeking help and counsel from them.

"One of two things must have happened," she said to herself. "Either Gabriel has learned that he is really my brother, or he has lost all hope of ever penetrating the fatal mystery. I have only to choose between these two calamities. Yes, it must be so, and I have no more illusions on which I can feed my hope. But ought not Gabriel to have spared me this cruel uncertainty? He gives me back my word; but why? Oh, why does he not confide to me what is going to become of him, and what he means to do? Ah, this silence terrifies me more than all the anger and all the threats in the world!"

Diane questioned her very soul to know whether she would do better to follow her first plan, and enter some convent in Paris or the Provinces, never to leave its walls again; or whether it was not her duty to return to court, try to see Gabriel once more, and beg him to tell her the truth as to what had occurred and as to his future plans, and whatever happened, to watch over the life of the king, her father, which might perhaps be in danger.

Of her father? But was Henri II. her father? Might she not prove herself to be the impious and guilty daughter of her real father in trying to impede the righteous vengeance which strove to punish or even to slay the king? A frightful alternative!

But Diane was a woman, and an affectionate and noble-hearted woman. She said to herself that in any event there might be repentance for anger, but that no one could repent of having forgiven ; and so, carried away by her naturally kindly disposition, she determined to return to Paris, and until she should have reassuring news of Gabriel and his designs, to remain by the king's side to safeguard and defend him. Even Gabriel himself might have need of her intervention, who could say ? When she should have saved the two beings who were dearest of all on earth to her, it would be time to take refuge in God's bosom.

Having determined upon this course, Diane, the brave-hearted, hesitated no longer, but continued her journey to Paris.

She reached her destination three days later, and went at once to the Louvre, where she was welcomed by Henri with unfeigned delight and a wealth of affection truly paternal.

But, in spite of all her endeavors, she could not force herself to adopt any except a sorrowful and cold demeanor in receiving these proofs of fondness ; and the king himself, remembering Diane's affection for Gabriel, oftentimes felt embarrassed and moved in his daughter's presence. She reminded him of certain matters which he would have much preferred to forget.

Thus he no longer dared to mention her alliance to François de Montmorency, which had been formerly projected, and so Madame de Castro's mind was at rest upon that point at least.

She had, however, many other subjects of anxiety. Neither at the Montgomery mansion, nor at the Louvre, nor in fact anywhere, was any definite news of Gabriel to be had.

The young man had in a certain sense disappeared.

Days and weeks and whole months rolled by, and Diane in vain made inquiries directly and indirectly; no one could say what had become of Gabriel.

Some persons thought that they had met him, always sombre and gloomy. But no one had spoken to him; the suffering soul which they had taken for Gabriel had always shunned them, and vanished at their first attempt to approach him. Moreover, no two agreed as to the locality where they had encountered Vicomte d'Exmès. Some said at St. Germain, some at Fontainebleau, others at Vincennes, and some even located him in Paris. What reliance could be placed upon such contradictory reports?

Yet many of them were right. For Gabriel, spurred on by a terrible remembrance and by still more terrible thoughts, could not remain two days in the same place. A never-ending need of action and movement drove him from a locality as soon as he arrived there. On foot or in the saddle, in town or country, he must always be in motion, pale and forbidding in appearance, and like Orestes of old haunted by the Furies.

His wanderings, too, kept him always out-of-doors; and he never entered within the walls of a house except when driven by absolute necessity.

On one occasion, however, Master Ambroise Paré, who had come back to Paris, his patients being all cured, and hostilities somewhat relaxed in the North, was surprised by a visit at his own house from his old acquaintance Vicomte d'Exmès. He received him with the deference due to one of gentle birth and the cordiality with which one welcomes a friend.

Gabriel, like a man newly returned from foreign lands, interrogated the surgeon upon matters which everybody knew all about.

Having in the first place asked him about Martin-Guerre, who, thoroughly cured, was probably on his way to Paris at that time, he questioned him about the Duc de Guise and the army. In that quarter matters had progressed marvellously. Le Balafré was before Thionville; Maréchal de Thermes had taken Dunkirk; Gaspard de Tavannes had taken possession of Guines and the province of Oie. In fact, the English no longer held one foot of ground in the whole kingdom, as François de Lorraine had sworn should be the case.

Gabriel listened with grave face, and apparently with little interest, to this good news.

"I am obliged to you, Master," he said to Ambroise Paré; "I rejoice to learn that our enterprise at Calais will not be without enduring results for France, at all events. Nevertheless it was not curiosity to hear of these matters which was my principal reason for coming to you. Master, long before I came to admire you for your great skill at the bedside of the wounded, I remember that certain words I heard you speak moved me deeply; it was one day last year in the little house on the Rue St. Jacques. Master, I have come to talk with you about these matters of religion, which your keen insight has penetrated so to the core. You have definitively embraced the cause of the Reformed religion, I suppose?"

"Yes, Monsieur d'Exmès," said Ambroise Paré, firmly. "The correspondence which the great Calvin was kind enough to enter into with me has removed my last doubts and my last scruples. I am now the most thoroughly devoted reformer of them all."

"Well, then, Master," said Gabriel, "will you not share your knowledge with a neophyte of the best intentions? I speak of myself. Will you not strengthen my doubting faith, as you would put in place a broken limb?"

"It is my duty to comfort and relieve the souls of my fellow-creatures as well as their bodies, when I can do so," said Ambroise Paré. "I am quite at your service, Monsieur d'Exmès."

For more than two hours they talked together, Ambroise ardent and eloquent, Gabriel calm and sorrowful, but a docile pupil.

At the end of that time Gabriel rose, and said to him, as he warmly pressed his hand, —

"Thanks! This conversation has done me much good. Unfortunately the time has not yet come when I can openly declare myself one of your number. It is necessary that I should wait yet a little while, even in the best interests of the Religion itself. Otherwise my conversion might well expose your holy cause to persecution some day, or to calumny at least. I know what I am saying. But now I understand, thanks to you, Master, that you and your fellows are really marching in the right path, and from this moment, believe that I am with you in heart, if not bodily. Adieu! Master Ambroise, adieu! We shall soon meet again."

Gabriel, without further elucidation of his words, took his leave of the surgeon-philosopher, and left the house.

In the early days of the following month, — May, 1558, — he appeared for the first time since his mysterious departure at his own home in the Rue des Jardins St. Paul.

There were new-comers there. Martin-Guerre had returned a fortnight previously, and Jean Peuquoy and his wife Babette had been living there for three months.

But God had not decreed that Jean's devotion should be put to the final test, nor perhaps that Babette's fault should go wholly unpunished. A few days before, she had been prematurely delivered of a dead child.

The poor mother had wept bitterly, but had bowed

her head in humble acceptance of a grief which seemed like an expiation to her repentant heart ; and as Jean Peuquoy had generously offered his sacrifice to her, so she in her turn for his sake resigned herself to the hand of God.

Moreover, the comforting affection of her husband and Aloyse's motherly encouragement did not fail the sweet child in her affliction.

Martin-Guerre, with his wonted good-humor, did his best to console her.

One day, as the four were sitting in friendly converse together, the door opened, and to their great amazement and still greater joy the master of the house, Vicomte d'Exmès himself, suddenly appeared, walking slowly and with a grave and sober face.

Four exclamations were heard as one ; and Gabriel was quickly surrounded by his two guests, his squire, and his nurse.

When their first transports of delight had subsided, Aloyse began eagerly to question him whom in words she called her lord and master, but who was always her child in the language of her faithful heart.

What had become of him during his long absence ? What did he mean to do now ? Did he not intend at last to remain among those who loved him so dearly ?

Gabriel laid a finger on his lips, and with a mournful but firm glance, imposed silence upon Aloyse's loving anxiety.

It was clear that he did not choose to explain his movements in the past or in the future, or that he could not.

But he took his turn at asking questions of Jean and Babette about their own affairs. Had they wanted for

anything? Had they any recent intelligence of their good brother Pierre at Calais?

He tenderly expressed his sympathy for Babette, and tried to comfort her so far as it is possible to comfort a mother who is weeping for her child.

Thus Gabriel passed the remainder of the day amid his friends and his retainers, always kind and affectionate toward them, but never for an instant shaking off the melancholy which overshadowed him like a black pall.

As for Martin-Guerre, who never once took his eyes off his dear master, found again at last, Gabriel spoke with him and inquired about his health with much interest. But throughout the whole day he never breathed a word of the promise he had made him months before, and seemed to have forgotten the engagement he had entered into to punish the wretch who had stolen his name and his honor, and had persecuted poor Martin with impunity for so long.

Martin himself was too respectful and too unselfish to direct his master's mind to the subject.

But when it was evening Gabriel rose, and said in a tone which admitted neither contradiction nor remonstrance, "I am obliged to leave you now."

Then turning to Martin-Guerre, he added, —

"My good Martin, I have been busy in your behalf during my travels, and unknown as I was, I have inquired and investigated; and I believe that I have at last found traces of the real truth of the matter in which you are interested; for I have not forgotten my engagement with you, Martin."

"Oh, Monseigneur!" cried the squire, overjoyed and embarrassed at the same time.

Gabriel continued, "I say again, I have collected sufficient proofs to justify me in believing that I am on the

right track. But now I must have your assistance, my friend. At the end of this week, start for your own province, but do not go directly there. Be at Lyons one month from to-day. I will meet you there at that time, and we will take measures for acting together."

"I will do as you say, Monseigneur," said Martin-Guerre; "but shall I not see you again, meanwhile?"

"No, no, I must be alone henceforth," Gabriel replied, vigorously. "I am going away again now; and do not try to hinder me, for it would simply cause me needless pain. Adieu, my dear friends. Martin, remember, — at Lyons, a month hence."

"I will await you there, Monseigneur," said the squire.

Gabriel took leave with great warmth of Jean Peuquoy and his wife, pressed Aloyse's hands in his, and without seeming to notice the good soul's grief, set out once more to resume that wandering life to which he seemed to have condemned himself.

CHAPTER XX.

IN WHICH ARNAULD DU THILL APPEARS ONCE MORE.

Six weeks later than the events last described, on the 15th of June, 1558, the green vine which clung to the brown walls of the finest house in the village of Artigues, near Rieux, served as a background for a picture of rural domesticity which while somewhat homely in character was not entirely without significance.

A man who, to judge from his dusty boots, had been walking quite a considerable distance, was sitting upon a wooden bench, carelessly holding his feet toward a woman who was on her knees before him busily unlacing his boots.

The man was frowning, the woman smiling.

"Haven't you finished yet, Bertrande?" said he, crossly. "You are so clumsy and slow that you almost drive me out of my wits."

"There, it's all done, Martin," said the woman, softly.

"There, it's all done, is it?" growled the pretended Martin. "Now where are my other boots? I'll wager that you did n't even think to bring them to me, you fool. So I shall have to go barefoot until you fetch them."

Bertrande disappeared within the house, and in less than a second returned with another pair of boots, which she hastened with her own hands to draw on her lord and master's feet.

Doubtless these individuals have been recognized as Arnould du Thill, still masquerading under the name

of Martin-Guerre, and now as always domineering and brutal, and Bertrande de Rolles, infinitely softened and brought to her senses by bitter experience.

"Where is my glass of beer?" asked Martin, in the same surly tone.

"It is all ready, dear," said Bertrande, timidly, "and I am just going to get it for you."

"I always have to wait," said the other, stamping with impatience. "Come, be quick about it, or I'll —"

An expressive gesture completed his sentence.

Bertrande went and came again with the swiftness of light. Martin took from her hands a brimming glass of beer, which he swallowed in one draught with evident satisfaction. "That's good," he condescended to say as he handed the empty glass to his wife.

"My poor love, are you warm?" she ventured to ask, wiping her rough-spoken spouse's forehead with her handkerchief. "Here, put on your hat, for fear of the draught. You are very tired, aren't you?"

"What!" growled Martin; "don't I have to fall in with the customs of this idiotic neighborhood, and on every anniversary of our wedding go round among all the villages hereabout to ask a pack of accursed relatives to dinner? Upon my word, I had forgotten this absurd custom, if you had not reminded me of it yesterday, Bertrande! However, I have made the rounds, and in two hours the whole tribe of hungry kinsfolk will be upon us."

"Thanks, dear," said Bertrande. "You are quite right; it is an absurd custom, but a peremptory one, to which we must submit, if we would not be looked upon as arrogant and scornful."

"Well reasoned," replied Martin, ironically. "And have you done your part, sluggard? Is the table laid in the orchard?"

"Yes, Martin, as you ordered."

"Have you been to invite the judge also?" asked the affectionate spouse.

"Yes, Martin; and he said that he would do his best to be present at the feast."

"Do his best!" cried Martin, angrily. "That is n't enough; he *must* come! You must have given the invitation wrong. I count upon gaining some influence over this judge, as you know perfectly well; but you always try to displease me. His presence was the only thing which reconciled me in the least to this tedious custom and the useless expense of this ridiculous anniversary."

"Ridiculous to celebrate the anniversary of our wedding!" rejoined Bertrande, while her eyes filled with tears. "Ah, Martin, to be sure, you are a learned man now; you have travelled much, and seen many things, and can afford to despise the old usages of the province; but no matter. This anniversary reminds me of a time when you were less harsh and more loving to your poor wife."

"Yes," said Martin, with a sardonic smile; "and when my wife was less loving and more of a termagant to me; when she even forgot herself so far sometimes as to —"

"Oh, Martin, Martin!" cried Bertrande, "do not recall those times; for they make me blush, and I find it hard now to explain my own actions."

"And so do I. When I think that I could ever have been such an ass as to put up with — Ah, ah! let us leave the subject! My disposition is much changed, and yours as well, — I am glad to do you that justice. As you say, Bertrande, I have seen a good deal since those days. Your unbearable temper, which drove me out into

the world to get rid of you, also compelled me to gain experience ; and when I returned here last year, I succeeded in rearranging matters in their proper order. To effect that result, I had only to bring with me another Martin, called ' Martin Club.' So now everything goes along to my satisfaction, and we certainly have a most united household."

"That is true, thank God !" said Bertrande.

"Bertrande !"

"Martin !"

"Go at once," said he, with the tone of an absolute master, — "go back at once to the judge of Artigues, renew your invitation, and obtain his formal promise to be present at our feast ; if he does not come, remember that I will wreak my disappointment on you alone."

"I will go at once," said Bertrande, suiting the action to the word.

Arnauld du Thill followed her retreating form for a moment with a satisfied expression ; then, being left alone, he stretched himself lazily on the bench, drinking in the fresh air, and blinking with the selfish and disdainful comfort of a man happy in having nothing to fear and nothing to wish for.

He did not notice a man, apparently a traveller, who with the aid of a cane was walking laboriously along the road, — which was quite deserted, that being the hottest hour of the day. As the traveller saw Arnauld, he stopped in front of him.

"Pardon me, my friend," said the stranger. "Is there not, pray, in this village of yours an inn where I may rest and dine?"

"No, there is not," replied Arnauld, without moving ; "you will have to go to Rieux, two leagues from here, before you will come across an innkeeper's signpost."

"Two leagues more!" exclaimed the wayfarer; "and I am quite exhausted now. I would willingly give a pistole for a chance to lie down, and for something to eat at this moment."

"A pistole!" said Arnould, ever on the alert, as of old, when money was to be had. "Well, my good fellow, we can give you, if you wish, a bed in a corner here; and as for dinner, — why, we are going to have an anniversary feast to-day, and one guest more will make no difference. How does that suit you?"

"Perfectly," replied the stranger; "for, as I told you, I am almost fainting with fatigue and hunger."

"Very well; it's a bargain, then," said Arnould; "you may remain here for a pistole."

"I will pay in advance," said the traveller.

Arnould du Thill sat up to take the money, and at the same time raised his hat, which had concealed his eyes and his face.

The stranger was then able to see his features; and at the first glance he cried, recoiling in amazement, —

"My nephew, Arnould du Thill!"

Arnould looked carefully at him, and turned pale; but he soon collected himself.

"Your nephew?" said he. "Why, I don't know you! Who are you?"

"You don't know me, Arnould?" exclaimed the stranger; "you don't know your old uncle, your mother's own brother, Carbon Barreau, to whom you have been the source of so much trouble, — as indeed you have been to the whole family?"

"By my faith, no!" said Arnould, with an insolent laugh.

"What! do you deny me and yourself as well?" rejoined Carbon Barreau. "Tell me, do you mean to say

that you did not cause your mother, who was my sister, to die of grief, — a poor, lone widow, whom you abandoned at Sagias ten years ago? Ah! you may not recognize me, hard heart; but I know you well.”

“I have no idea what you mean,” replied Arnould, brazenly, entirely cool and collected. “My name is not Arnould, but Martin-Guerre; and I am not from Sagias, but belong in Artigues. The old men in the neighborhood have known me from my birth, and will swear to my identity; and if you want to be laughed at, you have only to repeat your statement before my wife, Bertrande de Rolles, and all my kinsfolk.”

“Your wife! your kinsfolk!” said Carbon Barreau, in bewilderment. “Pardon! Is it possible that I am mistaken? No; it cannot be! Such a resemblance —”

“At the end of ten years it is hard to verify,” Arnould interrupted. “Come, your sight is growing dim, my good friend! My real uncles and relatives you can see and talk with yourself very soon.”

“Oh, very well! In that case,” replied Carbon Barreau, who began to be convinced, “you may well boast of your resemblance to my nephew, Arnould du Thill.”

“I never heard of him except from you,” said Arnould, sneeringly, “and I never have boasted of it yet.”

“Ah, when I said that you might boast of it,” returned the good man, “I did not mean that there was any cause for pride in resembling such a rascal, far from it! I am in a position to say, since I am one of the family, that my nephew was the most infernal blackguard imaginable. And indeed when I reflect, it seems very improbable that he should still be alive, for the villain must have been hung long before this.”

“Do you think so?” retorted Arnould, not without bitterness.

"I am sure of it, Monsieur Martin-Guerre," said Carbon Barreau, with an air of conviction. "However, it doesn't offend you, does it, to have me speak in such terms of the scoundrel, since you are not he, my good host?"

"Not in the least," said Arnould, decidedly ill at ease, however.

"Ah, Monsieur," continued the uncle, who was rather inclined to chatter, "how many times have I congratulated myself, in speaking to his poor weeping mother, on having remained unmarried, and having had no children to dishonor my name and ruin my life, as that vile good-for-nothing did for her."

"Let me see; that is true," said Arnould to himself. "Uncle Carbon had no children, — no heirs, that is to say."

"What are you thinking, Master Martin?" asked the stranger.

"I was thinking," Arnould replied in his sweetest tones, "that in spite of your assertions to the contrary, Messire Carbon Barreau, you would be very happy to-day if you had a son, or even, in default of a son, this same evil-disposed nephew, whom you seem to regret so little, but who would at least be something for you to love, and somebody to whom you could hand down your property when you die."

"My property?" said Carbon Barreau.

"Yes, to be sure, your property," replied Arnould. "You who scatter pistoles around with so lavish a hand cannot be poor; and this Arnould, whom I resemble, would be your heir, I suppose. *Pardieu!* I am inclined to regret to a certain extent that I am not he."

"Arnould du Thill, if he is not hung, would really be my heir," returned Carbon Barreau, gravely. "But he

will derive no great advantage from that fact, for I am not rich. I offer a pistole for the privilege of resting a while and for a little refreshment, because I am overborne with weariness and hunger; but that does not prevent my purse from being light, — too light, alas!”

“Hum!” said Arnould, incredulously.

“Don’t you believe me, Master Martin-Guerre? As you please. It is no less true that I am now on my way to Lyons, to see the President of the Parliament, where I acted as usher for twenty years, who offers me shelter and sustenance for the rest of my days. He sent me twenty-five pistoles to pay my few small debts, and the expenses of the journey, large-hearted man that he is! But what I have left of that sum is all that I own in the world. Therefore my heritage is too trifling a matter for Arnould du Thill, even were he alive, to take the trouble to claim it. That is why —”

“Enough of this, dotard!” Arnould du Thill rudely interrupted him, in high ill-humor. “Do you suppose I have time to listen forever to your twaddle? Just give me your pistole and go into the house, if you choose. You shall dine in an hour’s time, and can sleep after that, and then we shall be quits. That does not require so much talk.”

“But it was you who questioned me,” said Carbon Barreau.

“Come, come! Do you propose to go in, fellow, or not? See, some of my guests are already arriving, and with your leave I will quit you to receive them. Go in. I treat you without ceremony, and do not escort you.”

“So I see,” said Carbon Barreau, as he entered the house, grumbling at his host’s sudden changes of humor.

Three hours later the company was still at the table under the elms. The number of the guests was complete,

and the judge of Artigues, whose favor Arnould meant to win, had the place of honor.

Good wine and pleasant talk were circulating. The younger people talked of the future and the graybeards of the past, while Uncle Carbon Barreau had been able to make sure that his host was really called Martin-Guerre, and was recognized and treated by all the inhabitants of Artigues as one of themselves.

"Do you remember, Martin-Guerre," said one of them, "the Augustinian monk, Brother Chrysostom, who taught us both to read?"

"Yes, I remember him," said Arnould.

"Do you remember, Cousin Martin," asked another, "that it was on your wedding-day that cannon were first fired at a merry-making in the province?"

"Yes, I remember," replied Arnould.

And, as if to refresh his memory, he embraced his wife, who was sitting at his side, the picture of happy pride.

"Since your memory is so exceedingly good, my good Master," suddenly exclaimed a clear, firm voice behind the guests, addressing Arnould du Thill, "since you remember so many things, perhaps you may remember me, as well!"

CHAPTER XXI.

JUSTICE IN A QUANDARY.

HE who spoke thus, in a commanding tone, cast aside the dark cloak of ample dimensions which hid his person ; and Arnould du Thill's guests, who had turned at the sound of his voice, could see a young cavalier of haughty bearing and richly dressed.

At a little distance a servant was holding by their bridles the two horses on which he and his master had ridden.

All rose respectfully, greatly surprised and very curious. Arnould du Thill turned as white as a dead man.

"Monsieur le Vicomte d'Exmès," he muttered in his fright.

"Well," continued Gabriel, in a voice of thunder, addressing him, — "well! you recognize me, do you?"

Arnould, after hesitating a moment, had quickly reckoned up his chances, and decided upon the course he should take.

"To be sure," said he, in a trembling voice which he struggled to control, — "to be sure I recognize Monsieur le Vicomte d'Exmès, from having sometimes seen him at the Louvre when I was in the service of Monsieur de Montmorency; but I cannot believe that Monseigneur would recognize me, the poor and obscure servant of the constable."

"You forget," said Gabriel, "that you have been my servant as well."

"What, I?" cried Arnauld, feigning the most extreme amazement. "Oh, pardon, Monseigneur is surely mistaken!"

"I am so certain that I am not mistaken," retorted Gabriel, calmly, "that I without hesitation call upon the judge of Artigues, here present, to cause your immediate arrest and imprisonment. Is that sufficiently clear?"

There was a movement of affright among the guests. The wondering judge drew near. Arnauld alone retained his appearance of tranquillity.

"May I not at least know of what crime I am accused?" he asked.

"I accuse you," replied Gabriel, firmly, "of having wickedly substituted yourself for my squire, Martin-Guerre, and of having basely and treacherously stolen his name, his house, and his wife, by means of a resemblance so exact that it passes understanding."

Upon hearing this concisely stated accusation, the guests exchanged looks of stupefied bewilderment.

"What does this mean?" they whispered. "Martin-Guerre not Martin-Guerre? What diabolical sorcery is at the bottom of all this?"

Several of the good people crossed themselves, and repeated beneath their breath certain words designed to exorcise evil spirits. The majority began to look upon their host with something like terror.

Arnauld du Thill saw that it was time for him to strike some decisive blow to win back these timid and yielding creatures to his side; so turning to her whom he called his wife, he cried, —

"Bertrande, speak, I conjure you! Am I or am I not your husband?"

Poor Bertrande, terrified and gasping, thus far had simply, without uttering a word, watched first her hus-

band and then Gabriel, with her great eyes open to their fullest extent.

But at Arnould du Thill's imperious gesture and his threatening tone, she hesitated no longer, but threw herself into his arms with effusion.

"Dear Martin-Guerre!" she cried.

At these words the charm was broken, and the offensive murmurs were turned against Gabriel.

"Monsieur," said Arnould du Thill, triumphantly, "in the face of my wife's testimony and that of all my friends and kinsmen, do you still persist in your strange accusation?"

"I do indeed," was Gabriel's reply.

"One moment!" cried Master Carbon Barreau, interposing. "I know very well, my host, that I am not losing my eyesight. If there is somewhere a person who resembles this man, feature for feature, then I declare that one of the two is my nephew, Arnould du Thill, like myself a native of Sagias."

"Ah, what a fortunate reinforcement just at the right moment!" said Gabriel. "Master," he added, addressing the old man, "do you recognize this man as your nephew?"

"In truth," said Carbon Barreau, "I don't know how to tell whether it is he or the other one; but I would be willing to take my oath in advance that if there is any imposture, my nephew is the impostor, for he was always much addicted to that sort of thing."

"You hear, Monsieur le Juge," said Gabriel to the magistrate; "whichever be the culprit, there can no longer be any doubt about the crime."

"But where is this fellow who, to cheat me, claims to have been cheated himself?" cried Arnould du Thill, boldly. "Am I not to be confronted with him? Is he

in hiding? Let him come forward, and submit to judgment himself."

"Martin-Guerre, my squire," said Gabriel, "has already surrendered himself to the authorities at Rieux, in accordance with my command. Monsieur le Juge, I am the Comte de Montgomery, formerly captain of his Majesty's Guards. The accused himself recognizes me. I call upon you to order him to be arrested and confined, as his accuser has been. When they are both in the hands of justice I hope that I shall be able easily to prove on which side is the truth, and on which the imposture."

"That is very clear, Monseigneur," said the confused judge to Gabriel. "Let Martin-Guerre be taken to prison."

"I give myself up," said Arnould, "strong as I am in my innocence. My dear, kind friends," he added, addressing the throng, whom he judged it prudent to keep in his interest, "I rely upon your loyal testimony to aid me in this extremity. All of you who have known me heretofore recognize me, do you not?"

"Yes, yes, never fear, Martin!" replied all the friends and kinsfolk, touched by his appeal to them.

As for Bertrande, she had taken occasion to swoon.

Eight days later the hearing of the cause began before the court at Rieux.

Surely it was a curious case, and one difficult to decide. It certainly deserved to be handed down as a *cause célèbre* to our own days, three hundred years later, as it has been.

If Gabriel de Montgomery had not been somewhat involved in it, it is quite probable that the good judges of Rieux, to whom the cause was submitted, would never have been able to decide it.

What Gabriel was most earnest in asking was that the two adversaries should not be allowed to meet under any pretext until otherwise ordered. They were interrogated and confronted with the witnesses separately, and Martin, as well as Arnauld du Thill, was kept in most rigorous seclusion.

Martin-Guerre, wrapped in a heavy cloak, was confronted one by one with his wife and all his neighbors and friends, all of whom recognized him. It was his face and his figure, and they could not be mistaken.

But all of them were equally positive in their recognition of Arnauld du Thill when he was shown to them.

Carbon Barreau, on the other hand, was equally positive in his recognition of each of them as his nephew, Arnauld du Thill.

They were all excited and terrified, and there seemed to be not the slightest guide by which the truth might be made to appear.

How was it possible to distinguish between two who were such exact counterparts as Arnauld du Thill and Martin-Guerre?

"The Evil One himself would be at his wit's end," said Carbon Barreau, in his confusion between his two nephews.

But in unravelling this unprecedented and extraordinary freak of Nature, the most reliable guides for Gabriel and the judges, failing material differences, would be contradictions in matters of fact and divergent characteristics.

In the story of their early years, Martin and Arnauld du Thill, each in his turn, told exactly the same facts, remembered the same dates, and mentioned the same names, with remarkable unanimity.

In support of his statements, Arnauld produced Ber-

trande's letters, the family papers, and the ring which was blessed on his wedding day.

But Martin explained it by telling how Arnould, after having given him up to be hung at Noyon, had had an opportunity to steal all the papers and his wedding-ring.

Thus nothing removed the perplexity of the judges, and their uncertainty never grew less. The appearances and indications were as strong and convincing on one side as on the other; and the allegations of the two accused seemed equally sincere.

Fresh proofs and additional testimony were needed to untie so complicated a knot. Gabriel undertook to find and produce them.

In the first place, the presiding judge propounded this question anew to Martin and to Arnould du Thill, separately as before.

"Where did you pass your time between your twelfth and your sixteenth year?"

The immediate answer of each of the accused was, —

"At St. Sébastien, in Biscaye, with my cousin Sanxi."

Sanxi was present, summoned as a witness, and testified to the truth of the fact.

Gabriel approached him, and whispered a word in his ear.

Sanxi laughed, and began to address Arnould in the Basque tongue. Arnould turned pale, and said not a word.

"What!" said Gabriel, "you passed four years at St. Sébastien, and yet do not understand the dialect of the province?"

"I have forgotten it," stammered Arnould.

Martin-Guerre, when submitted to this test in his turn, chattered away in Basque for a quarter of an hour, to the

great delight of Cousin Sanxi and the edification of the spectators and judges.

This first indication to throw light upon the truth was soon followed by another, which although similar to an experience of Ulysses was no less significant.

The inhabitants of Artigues who were contemporaries of Martin-Guerre still remembered with admiration not unmixed with envy his skill at tennis; but since his return the false Martin had always declined to play when it was suggested, on the plea of a wound in his right hand.

The true Martin-Guerre, on the other hand, took great delight in holding his own against the most expert tennis-players in the presence of the judges.

He played sitting down even, and always wrapped in his cloak. His partner did nothing but bring him the balls, which he hit with really marvellous dexterity.

From that moment public sympathy, so potent a factor on such occasions, was on Martin's side, — that is to say, as very seldom happens, on the side of right.

One more curious fact put the finishing touch to Arnould du Thill's chances with the judges.

The two accused men were of precisely the same height; but Gabriel, always on the watch for the least sign, thought that he had discovered that his brave squire's foot, his only foot, alas! was much smaller than Arnould du Thill's.

The old cobbler of Artigues appeared before the court with his old and new measurements.

"Yes," said the old fellow, "it is certain that Martin-Guerre used to wear nines, and I was greatly surprised when he returned to find that he wore twelves; but I took it to be the effect of his long journeys."

The true Martin-Guerre then proudly held out to the

cobbler the only foot which Providence had left him, to aid doubtless in the grander triumph of the truth. The simple-minded old man, having taken its measure, recognized it, and declared it to be the identical foot he had shod in former days, and which had remained almost the same in spite of its long travels and the double service it had had to do.

After that decisive testimony everybody was unanimous for Martin's innocence and the guilt of Arnould du Thill.

But these material proofs were not enough, and Gabriel desired to adduce moral certainty in addition.

He produced the peasant to whom Arnould du Thill had intrusted the strange commission to announce Martin-Guerre's death by hanging at Noyon. The good man ingenuously told of his amazement at finding in the Rue des Jardins St. Paul the very man whom he had seen take the Lyons road. This was the circumstance which had aroused Gabriel's first suspicion of the real truth.

Then Bertrande de Rolles was examined anew.

Poor Bertrande, in spite of the general change of opinion, was still for him who aroused her fear.

Being asked if she had not noticed a change in her husband's disposition since his return, she replied, —

“Oh, yes, indeed! he came back much changed; but for the better, Messieurs,” she hastened to add.

Being pressed to explain herself more clearly, she said naïvely, “Formerly, Martin was weaker and more good-natured than a sheep, and let me lead him about and cuff him till I was ashamed of him. But he came back a man, a master. He proved to me beyond a doubt that I was very wrong before, and that it is my duty as his wife to obey his word and his stick. Now he commands, and I wait upon him; he lifts his hand, and I kiss his feet. He brought back this air of

authority from his travels, and since his return our relations have become what they should be. We are going in the right direction now, and I am very glad of it."

Others of the Artigues people testified that the old Martin-Guerre had always been as inoffensive and pious and kind as the new one was quarrelsome and blasphemous and niggardly.

Like the cobbler and Bertrande they had attributed these changes to his travels.

At last Comte Gabriel de Montgomery deigned to give evidence, amid the respectful silence of judges and spectators.

He told of the strange circumstances attending his having in his service the two Martin-Guerres, one after the other; how he had puzzled for a long while over the singular variations in the disposition and character of his double squire, and of the events which had finally led him to suspect the truth.

In short, Gabriel told everything that we have told heretofore, — Martin's frights and Arnould du Thill's treason, the virtues of the one and the crimes of the other; he made the whole obscure and confused history as clear as day, and ended by demanding punishment of the culprit and restitution of his rights for the innocent man.

The justice of that day was less obliging and convenient for accused persons than that of the present time. Thus it was that Arnould du Thill was still ignorant of the overwhelming evidence adduced against him. He had seen with much anxiety the tests of knowledge of the Basque patois and skill in the game of tennis result to his disadvantage; but he believed that he had, after all, given sufficiently plausible excuses. As for the episode

of the old cobbler, he had understood nothing of it. Last of all, he did not know whether Martin-Guerre, who was persistently kept out of his sight, had come out any better than he himself had from the various examinations and ordeals.

Gabriel, moved by a just and generous feeling, had insisted that Arnauld du Thill should be allowed to be present when the speech summing up the charges should be made, and to reply to it if necessary. Martin was under no such necessity, and remained in his prison. But Arnauld was brought before the tribunal so that judgment might be passed after hearing both sides ; and he lost not a word of Gabriel's forcible and convincing statement.

However, when Gabriel had finished, Arnauld du Thill, without yielding an inch to fear or discouragement, calmly rose and asked leave to speak in his own defence. The court would have refused ; but Gabriel seconded his request, and he was allowed to speak.

He spoke admirably ; the cunning blackguard was really eloquent by nature, and had a shrewd and clever mind.

Gabriel's principal endeavor had been to apply the evidence to dispelling the obscurity which hung about the adventures of the two Martins. Arnauld, on the other hand, devoted himself to twisting all the threads together again and to bringing the minds of the judges a second time into that state of confusion in which lay his only hope. He avowed that he himself could in nowise comprehend all the entanglements arising from these two existences, which were continually being mistaken for each other. It was not his affair to explain all the blunders for which they tried to hold him responsible. All he had to do was to answer for his own life and justify his own actions ; and that he was ready to do.

He then repeated the logically arranged and compact story of his own acts and movements from his cradle down to that day. He spoke to his friends and kinsfolk, reminding them of circumstances which they had themselves forgotten, laughing at certain memories, and weeping at others.

He could not speak Basque, it is true, nor play tennis; but everybody had not the faculty of remembering languages, and he showed the scar on his hand. Even if his adversary had satisfied the court on those two points, nothing was easier when occasion demanded than to learn a patois and attain skill at a game by practice.

The Comte de Montgomery, certainly led astray by some mischief-maker, accused him of having stolen from his squire the papers which established his name and his identity; but there was no proof of that fact.

As for the peasant, who could say that he was not an accomplice of the *soi-disant* Martin?

Regarding the money for the Comte de Montgomery's ransom, which he, Martin-Guerre, was accused of having stolen, he could only say that he had returned to Artigues with a certain sum larger than that lost by the count; but he accounted for it by exhibiting the certificate of the very eminent and powerful nobleman, the Connétable Duc de Montmorency.

In his peroration, Arnauld with infinite address rung the changes upon the constable's mighty name in the ears of the bewildered judges. He insisted that they should send to make inquiries concerning him of his illustrious master, and he was confident that the result of such inquiries would be his speedy and decisive justification.

In short, the crafty rascal's speech was so clever and insidious, he expressed himself with so much warmth,

and impudence sometimes so closely resembles innocence, that Gabriel saw that the judges were undecided and wavering once more.

It was necessary then to strike a decisive blow ; and Gabriel, although it was much against his wish, determined to do it.

He spoke a single word in the president's ear ; whereupon the latter ordered Arnould du Thill to be remanded to prison and Martin-Guerre to be produced.

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEREIN IT SEEMS AS IF THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS WERE
ABOUT TO BEGIN AGAIN.

ARNAULD DU THILL was not at once taken back to the dungeon which he occupied in the conciergerie of Rieux. He was taken to a room adjoining that where the court was sitting, and was left alone for a few moments.

It might be, they told him, that after questioning his adversary, the judges would desire to hear him further. Left to his own reflections, the crafty scamp began by congratulating himself upon the effect he had evidently produced by his clever and bold speech. Brave Martin-Guerre, notwithstanding the righteousness of his cause, would surely find it hard to be so persuasive.

At all events Arnould had gained time. But on thinking matters over more carefully he could not conceal from himself that he had gained nothing else. The truth which he had so audaciously distorted would finally overwhelm him on all sides. Could he hope that Monsieur de Montmorency himself, whose testimony he had dared to invoke, would take the risk of using his position to shield the avowed misdeeds of his spy? It was doubtful, to say the least.

The result of Arnould's cogitations was that he gradually relapsed from hope to anxiety, and all things considered, said to himself that his position was not the most encouraging in the world.

He lowered his head under these discouraging thoughts, when some one came to take him back to prison.

So the tribunal had not thought best to question him further after Martin-Guerre's explanations! Another cause for anxiety.

All this, nevertheless, did not prevent Arnould du Thill, who noticed everything, from observing that it was not his ordinary jailer who had come to take him, and was with him at that moment.

Why the change? Were they redoubling their precautions against his escape? Did they hope to make him confess? Arnould determined to be on his guard, and said not a word during the whole walk.

But behold! another cause of amazement. The room to which this new custodian conducted Arnould was not the one he ordinarily occupied.

The latter had a barred window and a high chimney-piece, which were lacking in the other.

However, everything bore witness to the recent presence of a prisoner, — crumbs of bread still fresh, a half-emptied cup of water, a straw pallet, and a half-opened chest within which could be seen a man's clothes.

Arnould du Thill, who was well used to restraining his emotions, made no sign of surprise, but as soon as he found himself alone, he hastened to overhaul the chest.

He found nothing but clothes in it; nothing else to indicate its owner. But the clothes were of a color and cut which Arnould seemed to remember. Especially two jerkins of brown cloth, and yellow tricot breeches, which were neither of a common shade nor shape.

"Oho," said Arnould, "that would be strange!"

Just as night began to fall, the unknown jailer entered.

"Hallo, Master Martin-Guerre!" said he, laying his hand familiarly upon the pensive Arnould's shoulder in a way to signify that the jailer knew his prisoner very well, even if the prisoner did not know his jailer.

"What is the matter, pray?" Arnould asked this very friendly official.

"Well, it's just this, my dear fellow," the man replied; "your affair seems to be looking brighter and brighter. Who do you suppose has obtained leave from the judges, and now asks of yourself the favor of a few moments' conversation?"

"My faith, I can't imagine!" said Arnould. "How should I know? Who can it be?"

"Your wife, my friend; even Bertrande de Rolles herself, who is beginning to see, doubtless, which one of you has the right on his side. But if I were in your place, I would refuse to receive her, — that I would."

"Why so?" asked Arnould du Thill.

"Why?" repeated the jailer. "Why, because she has denied you for so long, of course! It is quite time for her to come over to the side of justice and truth, just when to-morrow at the latest the decree of the court will proclaim it publicly and officially! You agree with me, do you not? and I will send your ungrateful spouse about her business without ceremony."

The jailer took a step toward the door, but Arnould stopped him with a gesture.

"No, no!" said he, "don't send her away. On the other hand, I want to see her. In short, since she has obtained leave from the judges, show Bertrande de Rolles in, my dear friend."

"Hum! Always the same," said the jailer. "Always easy-going and good-natured. If you allow your wife to reassert her former ascendancy so quickly, you take a great risk. However, that's your business."

The jailer withdrew, shrugging his shoulders compassionately.

Two minutes later he returned with Bertrande de Rolles. It was growing darker every instant.

"I will leave you alone," said the jailer, "but I shall come to take Bertrande away before it is quite dark: those are the orders. So you have hardly a quarter of an hour; use it to quarrel or to make up, as you choose."

And he left the cell again.

Bertrande de Rolles came forward, shame-faced and with bent head, toward the pretended Martin-Guerre, who remained seated and silent, leaving it for her to begin the conversation.

"Oh, Martin!" said she at last, in a weak and hesitating voice, when she was at his side; "Martin, can you ever forgive me?"

Her eyes were wet with tears, and she was literally trembling in every limb.

"Forgive you for what?" replied Arnauld, who did not propose to commit himself.

"Why, for my stupid mistake," said Bertrande. "Of course I did very wrong not to recognize you. But was there not some excuse for my mistake, since it seems that at times you were deceived yourself? So it was necessary, I confess, to make me believe in my error, that the whole province, Monsieur le Comte de Montgommery, and justice, which knows everything, should prove to me that you are my true husband, and that the other is only a fraud and an impostor."

"But let us see," said Arnauld; "which is the ac-

knowledgeed impostor, — the one whom Monsieur de Montgommery brought hither, or the one whom they found in possession of Martin-Guerre's goods and name?"

"Why, the other!" replied Bertrande; "the one who deceived me so, and whom during the last week I have still called my husband, stupid, blind fool that I was!"

"Aha, so the thing seems to be pretty well established now, does it?" asked Arnould, with emotion.

"*Mon Dieu!* yes, Martin," Bertrande replied in some confusion. "The gentlemen of the court and your master, the worthy nobleman, told me just now that they had no longer any doubt, and that you were surely the true Martin-Guerre, my dear, good husband."

"Ah, indeed," said Arnould, whose cheek paled in spite of himself.

"Thereupon," continued Bertrande, "they gave me to understand that I would do well to ask your forgiveness, and to become reconciled to you before they pronounce judgment; so I asked and obtained leave to see you."

She stopped a moment, but seeing that her pretended husband gave no sign of replying, she went on, —

"It is only too certain, good Martin-Guerre, that I have been very guilty toward you. But I implore you to reflect that it has been entirely involuntary on my part, as I call the Holy Virgin and the child Jesus to witness! My first mistake was the not having unmasked and discovered the fraud of this Arnould du Thill. But could I imagine that there could be such a perfect resemblance in the world, and that the good God would amuse Himself by making two of His creatures so exactly alike? Alike in feature and in form, but not, it is true, in character and heart; and it was that difference which should have opened my eyes, I confess. But

why? Nothing warned me to be on my guard. Arnould du Thill talked to me of the past just as you yourself would have done. He had your ring and your papers, and not a single one of his friends or relatives suspected him. I acted in good faith. I attributed the change in your disposition to the experience you had gained in your extensive travels. Consider, my dear husband, that under the name of that stranger it was you whom I always loved, you to whom I submitted joyfully. Consider that, and you will forgive me for the first mistake, which led me — without intending it or knowing it, so help me God! — to commit the sin for which I shall pass the remainder of my days asking pardon from Heaven and from you.”

Bertrande de Rolles again paused in her justification to see if Martin-Guerre would not speak to her and encourage her a little. But he remained persistently silent. and poor Bertrande, with sinking heart, continued, —

“Even if it be impossible, Martin, for you to bear ill-will toward me for this first involuntary wrong, the second, unfortunately, deserves beyond question all your reproaches and all your anger. When you were not at hand, I might mistake another for you; but when you had presented yourself, and I had leisure to compare you with the other, I should have recognized you at once. But consider whether even in that matter my conduct does not admit of some excuse. In the first place, Arnould du Thill was, as you say, in possession of the title and name which belong to you, and it was extremely repugnant to my feelings to admit a supposition which would make me guilty. In the second place, I was hardly allowed to see you and speak with you. When I was confronted with you, you were not dressed in your ordinary dress, but were wrapped in a long coat

which hid your form and your gait from me. Then, too, I was kept secluded almost as closely as Arnauld du Thill and yourself, and I hardly saw either of you except before the court, always separately and at a considerable distance. In the face of that terrifying resemblance, what means had I of determining the truth? I made up my mind, almost haphazard, in favor of him whom I had called my husband just before. I implore you not to be angry with me for it. The judges to-day assure me that I was mistaken, and that they have abundant proofs of it. Thereupon I come to you, penitent and abashed, trusting only in your kind heart and the love of former days. Was I wrong to rely thus on your indulgence?"

After this direct question, Bertrande made another pause; but the false Martin still remained dumb.

Surely, in thus renouncing Arnauld du Thill Bertrande was adopting a curious method of softening his heart toward her; but she was acting in perfect good faith, and committed herself more and more irrevocably to that view which she believed to be the true one, in order to touch the heart of him whose forgiveness she supposed herself to be imploring.

"As for myself," she resumed humbly, "you will find my disposition much altered. I am no longer the scornful, capricious, ill-tempered virago who made life such a burden to you. The cruel treatment which I have undergone at the hands of that wretched Arnauld, and which ought to have condemned him in my eyes, has had one good result, at least, — in bending and taming my spirit; and you may expect to find me in future as easily managed and obliging as you yourself are gentle and kind-hearted. For you will be gentle and kind with me as you used to be, will you not? You are going to prove that now

by forgiving me ; and then I shall know you by your good heart, as I know you already by your features."

"So you do recognize me now, do you?" said Arnauld du Thill, at last.

"Oh, yes! indeed, I do," replied Bertrande; "but I blame myself for having waited for the judgment and decree of the court."

"So you do recognize me?" said Arnauld, persisting in his question. "You do realize now that I am not that intriguing scoundrel who had the assurance to call himself your husband no longer ago than last week, but that I am the real, legitimate Martin-Guerre, whom you have not seen before for many years? Look at me. Do you recognize me now, and acknowledge me as your first and only husband?"

"To be sure I do," said Bertrande.

"By what marks do you recognize me?" asked Arnauld.

"Alas!" said Bertrande, frankly, "only by the outward appearance of your person, I confess. Were you beside Arnauld du Thill and dressed like him, the resemblance is so exact that very likely I could not tell you apart even now. I know you for my true husband because I was told that I was to be taken to him, because you occupy this cell, and not Arnauld's, and because you receive me with the calm severity which I deserve; while Arnauld would be trying still to abuse me and deceive me —"

"Wretched Arnauld!" cried Arnauld himself, harshly. "And you, weak and credulous woman —"

"Don't spare me!" was Bertrande's rejoinder. "I much prefer your reproaches to your silence. When you have said to me all that you have at heart — for I know how kind and indulgent you are — you will soften toward me and forgive me!"

"Very well!" said Arnould, in a somewhat milder tone. "Don't be downhearted, Bertrande; we will see."

"Ah!" exclaimed Bertrande, "what did I say? Yes, you are, indeed, my own dear Martin-Guerre!"

She threw herself at his feet, and bathed his hands with her honest tears, — for she really believed she was talking with her husband; and Arnould du Thill, who was observing her distrustfully, could find no excuse for the least suspicion. Her expressions of joy and penitence were not ambiguous.

"Very good!" Arnould muttered to himself; "you shall pay for all this some day, ingrate!"

Meanwhile he seemed to give way to an irresistible impulse of affection.

"I am weak, and I feel that I am yielding," said he, pretending to wipe away a tear which was not there; and, as if in spite of himself, he breathed a kiss upon the lowly head of the fair penitent.

"What ecstasy!" cried Bertrande; "he has almost forgiven me!"

At this moment the door opened, and the jailer reappeared.

"Humph! Made it up, have you?" said he, testily, as his eye fell upon the sentimental tableau presented by the happy pair. "I was sure of it, — you're such a milksop, Martin!"

"What's that? Do you blame him for his kind heart?" said Bertrande.

"Ha, ha! Come, come!" said Arnould, laughing in the most fatherly way.

"Well, as I said before, it's his business," replied the unmoved jailer; "and it's my business now to carry out my orders. The time has expired, and you cannot stay a minute longer, my weeping beauty."

"What! must I leave him already?" asked Bertrande.

"Yes. You will have time enough to see him to-morrow and all the rest of your days," was the reply.

"True, he will be free to-morrow!" rejoined Bertrande. "To-morrow, dear, we will begin again our peaceful life of former days."

"Postpone your caresses till to-morrow, too," observed the fierce jailer, "for now you must leave."

Bertrande kissed once more the hand which Arnauld du Thill held out to her royally, waved a last adieu to him, and preceded the jailer from the cell.

As the latter was closing the door, Arnauld called him back.

"May I not have a light, a lamp?" he asked.

"Yes, to be sure, just as you have every evening," said the jailer; "that is, until curfew,— nine o'clock. By our Lady! we don't treat you as harshly as Arnauld du Thill; and then, too, your master, the Comte de Montgomery, is so generous! You are well taken care of to oblige him. In five minutes I will bring your candle, friend Martin."

The light was brought to him very shortly by a turnkey, who withdrew at once, wishing the prisoner good-night, and reminding him anew to extinguish it at curfew.

Arnauld du Thill, when he found himself alone, quickly removed the linen suit that he wore, and clothed himself no less speedily in one of the famous suits, composed of a brown jerkin and yellow tricot small-clothes, which he had discovered in Martin-Guerre's chest.

Then he burned his former costume piece by piece in the flame of his candle, and mingled the ashes with those which were lying on the hearth.

It was all done in less than an hour; and he was enabled to extinguish his light and go virtuously to bed even before the curfew tolled.

"Now, we will see!" said he. "I seem to have been beaten before the court; but it will be very pleasant to succeed in deriving the means of victory from my defeat."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CRIMINAL'S SPEECH AGAINST HIMSELF.

WE can readily understand that sleep hardly visited Arnould du Thill's eyes that night. He lay stretched upon his straw litter, his eyes wide open, entirely engrossed with reckoning up his chances, laying plans, and marshalling his resources. The scheme he had devised, of substituting himself for poor Martin-Guerre once more, was an audacious one doubtless, but its very impudence endowed it with some chance of success.

Since luck favored him so marvellously, should he let his own audacity betray him?

No; he quickly adopted the course he was to follow, and left himself free to adapt his movements to events as they might shape themselves, and to unforeseen circumstances.

When day broke, he examined his costume, found it unexceptionable, and devoted himself anew to acquiring Martin-Guerre's gait and attitudes. His mimicry of his double's good-natured demeanor was so perfect as almost to be exaggerated. It must be confessed that the miserable blackguard would have made an excellent comedian.

About eight o'clock in the morning, the cell-door grated on its hinges.

Arnould du Thill suppressed a startled movement, and assumed an air of tranquil indifference.

The jailer of the night before reappeared, introducing the Comte de Montgomery.

"The devil! now the crisis is at hand!" said Arnould du Thill to himself. "I must be on my guard."

He waited anxiously for Gabriel's first word when he should look at him.

"Good-morning, my poor Martin-Guerre," Gabriel began.

Arnould breathed again. The Comte de Montgomery had looked him straight in the face as he called him by name. The misunderstanding began again, and Arnould was saved!

"Good-morning, my dear, kind Master," he said to Gabriel, with an effusiveness of gratitude which was in truth not wholly feigned.

He had the assurance to add, —

"Is there anything new, Monseigneur?"

"The sentence will be pronounced this morning in all probability," Gabriel replied.

"At last! God be praised!" cried Arnould. "I long for the end, I confess. There is no conceivable doubt now, — nothing more to fear, is there, Monseigneur? The right will surely triumph?"

"Indeed I hope so," said Gabriel, gazing at Arnould more intently than ever. "That villanous Arnould du Thill is reduced to desperate remedies."

"Is he really? And what infernal scheme is he hatching now?" asked Arnould.

"Would you believe it?" said Gabriel; "the impostor is trying to renew the old confusion."

"Can it be?" cried Arnould, with uplifted hands. "What is his pretext, in God's name?"

"Why, he has the assurance to claim," Gabriel replied, "that after the hearing was at an end, yesterday, the

jailers made a mistake, and took him to Arnauld's cell, and you to his."

"Is it possible?" said Arnauld, with a capitally feigned gesture of surprise and indignation. "What proof does he give in support of that impudent statement, — upon what does he base it?"

"This is what he says," said Gabriel. "It seems that he, like you, was not taken back at once to prison yesterday. The court, when they withdrew to consult, thought that they might desire to question one or both of you further; so the guards left him in the vestibule below, as they left you in the courtyard. Now he swears that that was the cause of the error, and that it had been the custom to leave Arnauld in the vestibule and Martin in the courtyard. The jailers, when they went to take their respective prisoners, naturally confused the one with the other, according to his story. As for the guards concerned, they are the same ones who have always had charge of the two, and these human machines only know their prisoners, without being able to distinguish their persons. He bases his new claims upon such absurd reasons as those; and he is weeping and shrieking and asking to see me."

"Have you seen him, Monseigneur?" asked Arnauld, eagerly.

"My faith, no!" said Gabriel. "I am afraid of his tricks and his wiles. He would be quite capable of deceiving me and leading me astray again. The blackguard is so bold and clever withal."

"Ah, Monseigneur defends him now!" rejoined Arnauld, feigning discontent.

"I am not defending him, Martin," said Gabriel; "but we must agree that his brain is full of expedients, and that if he had applied himself to earning an honest living with half the skill —"

"He's an infamous villain!" cried Arnould, vehemently.

"How severe you are upon him to-day!" replied Gabriel. "But I was thinking to myself as I came along, that after all he has not caused anybody's death; that if his condemnation is pronounced in a few hours, he will surely be hanged within a week; that capital punishment is perhaps an excessive penalty for his crimes, and that in short we might, if you choose, ask for mercy to be shown him."

"Mercy for him!" Arnould du Thill repeated with some hesitation.

"It requires thought, I know," said Gabriel; "but come now, — you have thought about it; what do you say?"

Arnould, with his chin in one hand, and rubbing his cheek with the other, remained for some seconds pensive without replying; but at last, having made up his mind, he said firmly, —

"No, no! no mercy! That will be much better."

"Oho!" replied Gabriel, "I did not know you were so vindictive, Martin; you are not generally so, and only yesterday you were pitying your adversary, and would have asked nothing better than to save his life."

"Yesterday, yesterday," muttered Arnould, "yesterday he had not played us this last trick, which is to my mind more shameful than all the others."

"That is very true," Gabriel remarked. "So you are very decidedly of the opinion that the culprit should die?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" replied Arnould, with a sanctified air, "you know, Monseigneur, how my soul revolts at violence and revenge, and all deeds of blood. My heart is torn to be compelled to yield to so cruel a necessity, but it is a necessity. Consider, Monseigneur, that so

long as this man who resembles me so closely is still in the land of the living, I can never lead a peaceful, happy life. This last bold stroke which he has just struck shows that he is incorrigible. If he is sentenced to be kept in prison he will escape ; if he is banished he will return, and therefore I shall always be anxious and in torment, expecting every moment that he will come back to worry me, and unsettle my whole life again. My friends and my wife will never be sure that they really are dealing with me, and suspicion will always be rife. I must always be on the watch for renewed struggles and fresh attacks on my identity. In short, I can never say I am really in possession of my own personality. Therefore I must in my grief and despair do violence to my character, Monseigneur ; I shall doubtless mourn all the rest of my days for having caused the death of a fellow-creature ; but it must be, it must be ! To-day's imposture removes my last scruples. Arnauld du Thill must die ! I yield to necessity."

"So be it, then, he shall die," said Gabriel. "That is to say, he shall die if he is condemned, for judgment has not been pronounced yet."

"What do you say ? Is n't it certain ?" asked Arnauld.

"It is probable, but not certain," was Gabriel's reply.

"That devil of an Arnauld addressed a very crafty and convincing speech to the judges yesterday."

"Cursed fool that I was !" thought Arnauld.

"While you, on the other hand, Martin," continued Gabriel, "you, who have just demonstrated to me with such admirable eloquence and conviction the necessity for Arnauld's death, could not, you will remember, find a single word to say before the court yesterday, nor could you adduce a single argument or a single fact to aid in the triumph of truth. You were confused and

remained almost dumb, in spite of my urgency. Although you had been informed as to your adversary's arguments, you did not know how to meet and reply to them."

"The reason is, Monseigneur," was Arnauld's response, "that I am at my ease with you alone, while all those judges frightened me. Besides, I confess that I relied upon the righteousness of my cause. It seemed to me that justice would plead for me better than I could for myself. But that seems not to be the case with these men of the law. They want words, nothing but words, I can see now. Ah, if it could only begin again, or if they would hear me even now!"

"Why, what would you do, Martin?"

"Oh, I would pluck up a little courage, and then I would speak. It would not be a difficult matter by any means to demolish all the proofs and allegations of Arnauld du Thill."

"I tell you that would not be an easy matter!" said Gabriel.

"Pardon me, Monseigneur," replied Arnauld; "I can see the weak points in his strategy as clearly as he can see them himself, and if I had been less timid, and if words had not failed me, I would have told the judges —"

"Well, what would you have told them, pray? Just tell me."

"What would I have told them? Why, nothing could be simpler."

Thereupon Arnauld du Thill set to work to refute his speech of the evening before, point by point. He unravelled the events and the mistakes of the double existence of Martin-Guerre and Arnauld with so much the more facility, because he had tangled them up himself. The Comte de Montgomery had left certain matters

still obscure in the minds of the judges, because he had been unable to explain them to his own satisfaction, but Arnould du Thill elucidated them with marvellous clearness. The result of his discourse was to show Gabriel the two destinies of the honest man and the rascal as clearly and sharply defined and distinguished, for all the confusion there had been in regard to them, as that between oil and water when put in the same vessel.

"Have you then been collecting information at Paris on your own account?" asked Gabriel.

"Without doubt I have, Monseigneur; and in case of need I could furnish proofs of what I say. I am not easily excited, but when I am driven into my last intrenchments, I can make energetic sorties."

"But," Gabriel continued, "Arnould du Thill invoked the testimony of Monsieur de Montmorency, and you do not reply to that."

"Indeed, I do, Monseigneur. It is very true that this Arnould has been in the constable's service, but his was a disgraceful employment. He must have been a sort of spy for him, and that fully explains why he attached himself to you, to follow you about and watch your movements. But though such people are employed, they are not acknowledged. Do you suppose that Monsieur de Montmorency would choose to accept the responsibility for the doings and sayings of his emissary? No, indeed! Arnould du Thill, perched at the bottom of the wall, would not really dare to call upon the constable; or if he did venture in despair of his cause, Monsieur de Montmorency would deny him. Now, to sum up—"

And in his clear and logical *résumé*, Arnould successfully demolished, bit by bit, the edifice of fraud which he had so skilfully constructed the preceding day.

With such facility in argument, and such a flow of words, Arnauld du Thill would have made a very distinguished advocate of our times. He had the misfortune to live three hundred years too soon. Let us have pity on his shade!

"I believe that all this is unanswerable," he remarked to Gabriel when he had finished. "What a pity it is that the judges cannot hear me again, or that they have not heard me now!"

"They have heard you," said Gabriel.

"How so?"

"Look!"

The door of the cell opened, and Arnauld, entirely bewildered and somewhat alarmed, saw the president of the tribunal and two of the judges, standing grave and motionless on the threshold.

"What does this mean?" asked Arnauld, turning toward Gabriel.

"It means," replied Monsieur de Montgomery, "that I suspected my poor Martin-Guerre's timidity, and wished that his judges, without his knowledge, should hear the unanswerable speech they have just heard."

"Wonderfully well done!" rejoined Arnauld, breathing freely once more. "I am a thousand times obliged to you, Monseigneur."

Turning to the judges, he said in a tone which he tried to render bashful, —

"May I think, may I hope, that my words have really established the justice of my cause in the enlightened minds which are at this moment arbiters of my destiny?"

"Yes," said the president; "the proofs which have been furnished us have convinced us."

"Ah!" said Arnauld du Thill, triumphantly.

"But," continued the president, "other proofs, no less certain and conclusive, compel us to state that there was a mistake yesterday in remanding the two prisoners to their cells, — that Martin-Guerre was taken to yours, Arnould du Thill, and that you are now occupying his."

"What! — how's that?" stammered Arnould, thunderstruck. "What do you say to it, Monseigneur?" he added, addressing Gabriel.

"I say that I knew it," replied Gabriel, sternly. "I say again, *Arnould*, that I desired to make you out of your own mouth furnish proofs of Martin's innocence and your own guilt. You have forced me, villain, to play a part which I abhor; but your unparalleled insolence yesterday made me understand that when one enters upon a struggle with such as you he must use the same weapons, and that frauds can only be conquered by fraud. However, you have left me nothing to do, but have been in such haste to betray your own cause that your cowardice has led you on to meet the trap that was set for you."

"To meet the trap, eh?" echoed Arnould. "So there was a trap, was there? But, in any event, you are abandoning your own Martin in my person; don't deceive yourself about that, Monseigneur!"

"Do not persist, Arnould du Thill," interposed the president. "The mistake about the cells was contrived and ordered by the court. You are unmasked beyond a peradventure, I assure you."

"But since you agree that there was a mistake," cried the irrepressible Arnould, "who can assure you, Monsieur le Président, that a mistake was not made in executing your orders?"

"The testimony of the guards and jailers," said the president.

"They are in error," retorted Arnould. "I am really Martin-Guerre, Monsieur de Montgomery's squire, and I will not submit to be convicted in this way. Confront me with your other prisoner, and when we stand beside one another dare to choose between us, — dare to distinguish Arnould du Thill from Martin-Guerre, the culprit from the innocent! As if there had not already been confusion enough in this cause, you must needs add to it. Your conscience will prevent your coming to any such conclusion. I will persist to the end, and in spite of everything, in crying, 'I am Martin-Guerre!' and I defy the whole world to give me the lie or to produce facts to contradict me."

The judges and Gabriel shook their heads, and smiled gravely and sorrowfully at this shameless and unblushing obstinacy.

"Once more, Arnould du Thill," said the president, "I tell you that there is no longer any possibility of confusion between Martin-Guerre and yourself."

"Why not?" said Arnould. "How can he be recognized? What mark distinguishes us?"

"You shall know, miserable wretch!" said Gabriel, indignantly.

He made a sign, and Martin-Guerre appeared upon the threshold.

Martin-Guerre without a cloak! Martin-Guerre mutilated, and with a wooden leg!

"Martin, my good squire," said Gabriel to Arnould, "after miraculously escaping from the gallows which you helped him to ascend at Noyon, was less fortunate at Calais in avoiding an act of vengeance which was only too justifiable, intended to punish one of your infamous deeds: he was hurled headlong into an abyss in your stead, and compelled to suffer amputation of one leg; but

by the mysterious working of the divine will, which is just when it appears most cruel, that catastrophe has now served to establish a point of distinction between the persecutor and the victim. The judges here present can no longer be deceived, since they may now recognize the criminal by his shamelessness, and the innocent man by his disfigurement."

Arnauld du Thill, pale and overwhelmed, and crushed beneath the terrible words and withering glances of Gabriel, no longer tried to defend or to deny himself; the sight of poor crippled Martin-Guerre rendered all his lies of no effect.

He fell heavily to the floor, an inert mass.

"I am lost!" he muttered, — "lost!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

JUSTICE.

ARNAULD DU THILL was, indeed, lost beyond recall. The judges at once met for deliberation, and within a quarter of an hour the accused was summoned before them to listen to the following decree, which we transcribe literally from the records of the time :—

“In consideration of the examination of Arnauld du Thill, called Sancette, alias Martin-Guerre, now confined in the conciergerie at Rieux :

“In consideration of the testimony of divers witnesses, to wit, Martin-Guerre, Bertrande de Rolles, Carbon Barreau, etc., and especially that of Monsieur le Comte de Montgommery :

“In consideration of the avowals of the accused himself, who, after trying in vain to deny it, finally confessed his crime :

“From which said examination, depositions, and avowals it appears :

“That said Arnauld du Thill has been duly convicted of fraud, forgery, false assumption of surname and baptismal name, adultery, rape, sacrilege, larceny, and other crimes :

“The court has condemned, and does now condemn and sentence said Arnauld du Thill :

“First. To do penance in front of the church of Artigues, on his knees, clad only in his shirt, with head and feet bare, having a halter about his neck, and holding in his hands a torch of burning wax :

“Secondly. To ask pardon publicly of God and the king and the outraged law, as well of the said Martin-Guerre and Bertrande de Rolles, husband and wife :

“And this done, said Arnould du Thill shall be delivered into the hands of the public executioner, who shall cause him to be led through the streets and public places of the said village of Artigues, still with the halter around his neck, until he shall be before the house of said Martin-Guerre :

“There to be hanged by the neck upon a gallows to be erected to that end on that spot, and his body to be afterward burned.

“And, in addition, the court has discharged from custody said Martin-Guerre and said Bertrande de Rolles, and does now remand said Arnould du Thill to the judge of Artigues, who will cause this decree to be carried into effect according to its form and tenor.

“Given at Rieux the 12th day of July, 1558.”

Arnould du Thill listened to this anticipated judgment with a gloomy and sombre air, although he repeated his confession, recognized the justice of the decree, and showed some repentance.

“I implore God’s clemency,” said he, “and the pardon of mankind, and am disposed to meet my fate like a Christian.”

Martin-Guerre, who was present at this scene, furnished fresh proof of his identity by bursting into tears at the words of his arch-enemy, hypocritical though they might be.

He conquered his ordinary bashfulness so far as to ask the president if there were not some means of obtaining mercy for Arnould du Thill, whom he freely forgave for the past so far as he was concerned.

But good Martin-Guerre was informed that the king alone had the right to interpose, and that for such an extraordinary and notorious crime he would surely refuse to exercise his right of pardon, even though the judges themselves should ask it of him.

“Yes,” Gabriel muttered to himself; “yes, the king

would refuse to show mercy. And yet he may well need that mercy should be shown himself! But in this case he would do right to be inflexible. No mercy! Never any mercy! Justice!"

Martin-Guerre's thoughts probably did not resemble his master's; for in his absolute need to forgive somebody, he at once opened his arms and his heart to the penitent and humble Bertrande de Rolles.

Bertrande was not even put to the trouble of repeating the prayers and promises which in her last very useful blunder she had poured out upon the forger Arnould du Thill, when she believed she was speaking to her husband. Martin-Guerre gave her no time to lament anew her errors and her weakness. He cut short her first attempt to speak with a loud kiss, and carried her off, triumphant and delighted, to the blissful little house which he had not seen for so many years.

In front of that very house, which had at last reverted to the hands of its true owner, Arnould du Thill, a week after his conviction, suffered the penalty which his crimes so well deserved.

Folks came from twenty leagues around to be present at the execution, and the streets of the wretched village of Artigues were more densely thronged that day than those of the capital.

The culprit, it must be said, showed a certain amount of courage in his last moments, and at least ended his shameful life exemplarily.

When the executioner had cried aloud to the people three times, according to custom: "Justice is done!" and while the crowd was slowly melting away in horrified silence, within the house of the victim of the culprit's wiles a man was weeping, and a woman praying; they were Martin-Guerre and Bertrande de Rolles.

His native air, the sight of the locality in which his youth had been passed, the affection of his kinsfolk and his old friends, and, above all, the loving attentions of Bertrande, in a very few days banished from Martin's face every trace of unhappiness.

One evening in this same month of July he was seated under the vine at his door, after a peaceful, happy day.

His wife was within, busy with her housekeeping cares, but Martin could hear her coming and going, so that he was not alone ; and he looked off to the right at the sun, which was just setting in all his glory, giving promise for the morrow of as beautiful a day as that which had just passed.

Martin did not see a horseman who rode up on his left, and dismounting, approached him noiselessly.

He stood a moment observing with a grave smile Martin's attitude of dreamy and peaceful contemplation. Then he reached out his hand, and without a word touched him on the shoulder.

Martin-Guerre quickly turned, and rose with his hand to his cap.

"What ! You, Monseigneur !" he said, with much emotion. "Pardon me, I did not see you coming."

"Don't apologize, my good Martin," replied Gabriel (for it was he) ; "I did not come to disturb your peace of mind, but on the other hand to assure myself of it."

"Oh, Monseigneur has only to look at me, then !" said Martin.

"That's what I was doing, Martin," observed Gabriel. "So you are happy, are you ?"

"Happier, Monseigneur, than the birds of the air or the fish in the sea."

"That is easily explained," returned Gabriel, "for you have found rest and plenty in your own home."

"Yes," said Martin-Guerre, "without doubt that is one of the reasons of my contentment. It may be that I have travelled sufficiently, seen enough battles, watched and fasted and suffered in a hundred ways sufficiently, to have earned the right, Monseigneur, to take pleasure in refreshing myself with a few days' rest. As for the plenty," he continued, in more serious fashion, "I have found the house well supplied, — too well supplied, in fact. The money does not belong to me, and I don't want to touch it. Arnauld du Thill brought it here, and I propose to restore it to its rightful owners. Much the greater part of it belongs to you, Monseigneur, for it was the money intended for your ransom which he stole. That sum is put aside all ready to be handed to you. As for the balance, it makes little difference how or where Arnauld obtained it; the gold would soil my fingers. Master Carbon Barreau thinks as I do, honest man, and having enough to live on, he declines to accept the unworthy heritage of his nephew. When the expenses of the trial are paid, the rest will go to the poor of the province."

"But in that case your property will not amount to much, my poor Martin," said Gabriel.

"I ask your pardon, Monseigneur. One does not serve a master so generous and open-handed as yourself for a long while without having something laid by. I brought a very respectable sum in my wallet from Paris. Besides, Bertrande's family were comfortably situated, and have left her some property. In short, we shall still be the magnates of the neighborhood when I have paid our debts and made all proper restitution."

"Touching this matter of restitution, Martin, I hope you will not refuse from my hand that which you scorned as a legacy from Arnauld. I beg you, my faithful ser-

vant, to keep, as a remembrance and a slight recompense, the sum which you say belongs to me."

"What, Monseigneur?" cried Martin, — "a gift of such magnificence to me!"

"Go to!" replied Gabriel; "do you imagine that I can pretend to pay you for your devotion? Shall I not always be your debtor? Have no scruples of pride with me, Martin, and let us say no more about it. It is understood that you will accept the trifle that I offer you — less to you than to me, in truth; for you tell me that you do not need this sum to live in comfort and to be highly considered in your province, consequently this will not add much to your happiness. Now as to this happiness of yours; you have not spoken very fully to me about it, but it ought to consist principally in your return to the loved spots which your infancy and your youth knew. Am I not right?"

"Yes, Monseigneur, that is quite true," said Martin-Guerre. "I have felt very contented and happy since I returned, just because I am at home. I gaze with emotion upon the houses and trees and roads, which no stranger would ever look at a second time. In fact, it seems that one never breathes so freely as in the air which he breathed the first day of his life."

"And your friends, Martin?" asked Gabriel. "I told you that I came to set my mind at rest on all matters touching your welfare. Have you found all your old friends again?"

"Alas! Monseigneur, some have died; but I have found a goodly number of the companions of my early days, and they all seem as fond of me as ever. They, too, are glad to acknowledge my frankness, my faithful friendship, and my devotion. My word! but they are ashamed that they could ever have mistaken Arnauld du

Thill for me, for he seems to have given them some specimens of a nature very different from mine. There were two or three of them who quarrelled with the false Martin-Guerre because of his evil actions. You should see how proud and contented they are now ! In short, they all vie with one another in overwhelming me with tokens of esteem and affection, — in order to make up for lost time, I fancy. Since we are talking about the causes of my happiness, Monseigneur, that is a very potent one, I assure you."

"I believe it, good Martin, I can well believe it. Ah, but in speaking of all the affection which sweetens your life you do not mention your wife."

"Ah, my wife," replied Martin, scratching his ear with an embarrassed air.

"To be sure, your wife," said Gabriel, anxiously. "What ! it can't be that Bertrande still torments you as before ? Has not her disposition changed for the better ? Is she still ungrateful for the kindness of heart and the relenting fate which have given her such a loyal and affectionate husband ? Is she still trying, Martin, with her shrewish and quarrelsome ways, to force you to leave your home and your dear old haunts a second time ?"

"Oh, no, quite the contrary, Monseigneur," said Martin-Guerre ; "she makes me too fond of my haunts and my native province. She waits upon me, coddles me, and kisses me. No more whims or domestic rebellions. Ah, indeed she is so sweet and equable as I never remember to have seen her before. I can't open my mouth that she does n't come running to me ; and she never waits for me to express my wishes, but seems to divine them. It is wonderful ! and as I am naturally easy-going and good-natured myself, rather than despotic and domineer

ing, our life is all honey, and our household the most united and happy one in the world."

"I am glad to hear it," said Gabriel; "but you almost frightened me at first."

"The reason for that, Monseigneur, was that I feel a little embarrassment and confusion, if I may say so, when this subject is under discussion. The sentiment I find in my heart when I examine myself on that subject is a very singular one, and makes me a little ashamed. But with you, Monseigneur, I may speak in all frankness and sincerity, may I not?"

"To be sure," said Gabriel.

Martin-Guerre looked carefully around to see that no one was listening, and especially that no one was within hearing. Then he said in a low voice, —

"Well, Monseigneur, I not only forgive poor Arnould du Thill, at this moment I bless him. What a service he rendered me! He made a lamb out of a tigress, an angel out of a devil. I welcome the fortunate results of his brutal manners, without having to reproach myself for them. For all tormented and harassed husbands, and they say the number of them is enormous, I can wish nothing better than a double, — a double as — persuasive as mine. In short, Monseigneur, although Arnould du Thill did most certainly cause me much annoyance and suffering, still do you not think that those troubles are more than atoned for, if he did but know it, by his energetic system, whereby he assured my domestic happiness and tranquillity for the rest of my days?"

"There's no doubt of that," said the young count, smiling.

"I am right, then," said Martin, joyfully, "in blessing Arnould, even though I do it in secret, since I am reaping every hour the happy fruits of his involuntary collabo-

ration. I am somewhat of a philosopher, as you know, Monseigneur, and I always look on the bright side. Therefore I am bound to say that Arnauld has done me more good than harm at every point. He has been my wife's husband in the interim; but he has given her back to me sweeter than a day in June. He stole my property and my friends from me temporarily; but thanks to him, my property returns to my possession in increased amount, and my friends even more closely bound to me. In fact, he was the means of subjecting me to some very rough experiences, notably at Noyon and at Calais; but my life to-day seems only more agreeable for his meddling with it. Wherefore I have every reason to be, and I am, well satisfied with this good Arnauld."

"You have a grateful heart," said Gabriel.

"Oh, but he whom, before all and above all, my grateful heart ought to thank and to reverence," continued Martin, becoming serious again, "is not Arnauld du Thill, my involuntary benefactor, but you, Monseigneur, you, to whom I really owe all these benefits, — my country, fortune, friends, and wife!"

"Again I repeat, enough of that, Martin," said Gabriel. "I ask only that you should have all these good things. And you have them, haven't you? Tell me again if you are happy."

"I repeat, Monseigneur, I am happier than I have ever been."

"That is all I desire to know," remarked Gabriel. "And now I must go."

"What, go?" cried Martin. "Are you really thinking of going so soon, Monseigneur?"

"Yes, Martin, there is nothing to keep me here."

"Pardon me, of course there is nothing. When do you mean to leave?"

"This very evening."

"And you never told me!" cried Martin-Guerre. "And I, sluggard! was dreaming away in utter forgetfulness. But wait, wait, Monseigneur, it will not be long!"

"Wait for what?" asked Gabriel.

"Why, for me to make my preparations for departure, to be sure!"

He rose nimbly and hastily, and ran to the door of the house.

"Bertrande, Bertrande!" he called.

"Why do you call your wife, Martin?" asked Gabriel.

"To get my things ready, and to say adieu, Monseigneur."

"But that's useless, my good Martin; for you are not going with me."

"What! You are not going to take me, Monseigneur?"

"No, I must go alone."

"Never to return?"

"Not for a long while, surely."

"What fault have you to find with me, Monseigneur, I pray you tell me?" asked Martin, sadly.

"None at all, my good Martin; you are the most devoted and faithful of servants."

"Yet you do not take me with you," returned Martin, "although it is natural that the servant should follow his master, that the squire should attend upon his lord."

"I have the best of reasons for it, Martin."

"May I venture to ask what they are, Monseigneur?"

"In the first place," replied Gabriel, "it would be downright cruelty for me to tear you away from this happy life which has come to you so lately, and from the repose you have so well earned."

"Oh, as for that, it is my duty to accompany you,

Monseigneur, and to serve you to my last hour ; and I would give up Paradise, I believe, for the sake of being at your side."

"Yes, but it is my duty not to abuse your zeal, for which I am grateful with all my heart," said Gabriel. "In the second place, the sad casualty which befell you at Calais will not allow you hereafter to render me such active service as you have done formerly."

"It is true, alas ! Monseigneur, that I can no longer fight by your side, or attend you in the saddle. But at Paris, at Montgommery, or in the field even, there are many confidential commissions with which you can still intrust the poor cripple, I hope, and which he will execute to the best of his ability."

"I know it, Martin ; and I might perhaps be selfish enough to accept your sacrifice were it not for a third reason."

"May I know that, Monseigneur ?"

"Yes," Gabriel replied with melancholy gravity ; "but only on condition that you will not seek to go to the bottom of it, and that you will be content with it, and not persist any further in following me."

"It must be a very serious and very imperious reason, then, Monseigneur ?"

"It is a sorrowful and unanswerable one, Martin," said Gabriel, in a hollow voice. "Until now my life has been an honorable one ; and if I had chosen to allow my name to be uttered more freely it would have been a glorious one. In fact, I believe that I may claim, without boasting, to have rendered France and her king great and valuable services ; for to speak only of St. Quentin and Calais, I think I may say that at those two places I discharged my debt to my country to the full."

"Who knows it better than I ?" said Martin-Guerre.

"Very true, Martin ; but in the same degree as this first part of my life has been loyal and unselfish and open to the broad light of day, the balance of my days will be passed in gloom and fear, always seeking to hide itself in the darkness. Doubtless, I shall have the same vigor at my command ; but it will be exerted for a cause which I cannot avow, and to attain an end which I must conceal. Thus far, in the open field, before God and man, it has been my pleasure to strive manfully and joyously for the reward of gallantry. Hereafter it is my duty, in darkness and suffering, to avenge a crime. Hitherto I have fought ; now I must punish. From being a soldier of France I have become the executor of the will of God."

"Holy Jesus !" cried Martin-Guerre, with hands clasped as if in supplication.

"Therefore," continued Gabriel, "I must needs undertake alone this ill-omened task, — in which I pray Heaven to employ my arm only, not my will, and in which I desire to be merely the blind instrument, not the guiding and directing brain. Since I ask, since I hope and trust, that my fearful duty will employ only half of my own being, how can you think that I would dream of associating you with it ?"

"That is very true, and I understand, Monseigneur," said the faithful squire, with lowered head. "I thank you for having condescended to give me this explanation, much as it grieves me ; and I accept it, as I promised to do."

"I thank you, too, for your submissiveness," replied Gabriel ; "for I assure you that your devotion helps to lighten the heavy burden which is almost too much for me even now."

"But, Monseigneur, is there absolutely nothing that I can do to serve you at this crisis ?"

"You can pray God, Martin, to spare me the necessity of taking the initiative in this struggle, which I contemplate with such bitter pain. You have a devout heart, and have led an honest and pure life, my friend, and your prayers may be of more help to me now than your arm."

"I will pray, Monseigneur, I will pray, —how ardently I need not tell you!"

"And now, adieu, Martin," said Gabriel; "I must leave you and return to Paris, to be prepared and on the spot whenever it pleases God to give the signal. All my life I have defended the right, fighting on the side of justice; may God remember that in my favor at the supreme hour of which I speak! May He mete out justice to His servant, even as I have done to mine!"

With his eyes upturned to heaven, the noble youth repeated, —

"Justice! justice!"

For six months past, whenever Gabriel's eyes had been open, they were generally intently fixed upon that Heaven at whose hands he asked for justice; when they were closed, he seemed always to see once more the gloomy Châtelet, in his gloomier reflections, which would at such times make him cry aloud, "Vengeance!"

Ten minutes later he tore himself away with great difficulty from the tearful farewells of Martin-Guerre and Bertrande de Rolles, who had come at her husband's summons.

"Adieu, adieu, good Martin, my faithful friend!" he said, releasing his hands almost by force from the fervent grasp of his squire, who was kissing and sobbing over them. "I must go now. Adieu! We shall meet again."

"Adieu, Monseigneur! God preserve you! — oh, I pray that He will preserve you!"

Poor Martin, choked with grief, could say no more than that.

Through his tears he saw his master and benefactor remount his horse in the fast-gathering darkness, which soon hid from his eyes the sombre figure of the horseman, as it had hidden his life from him for a long time past.

CHAPTER XXV.

TWO LETTERS.

AFTER the happy ending of the complicated trial between the two Martin-Guerres, Gabriel de Montgomery disappeared again for several months, and resumed his wandering, mysterious, and apparently purposeless existence. Again he was seen and recognized in twenty different places; nevertheless, he was never far away from the neighborhood of Paris and the court, always standing back in shadow, so that he might see everything without being seen.

He awaited events; but events arranged themselves very little to his liking. The soul of the young man, entirely absorbed by one idea, did not yet see its way clear to the issue which his righteous vengeance awaited.

The only important occurrence in the world of politics during these months was the conclusion of peace by the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis.

The Constable de Montmorency, jealous of the exploits of the Duc de Guise, and of the new claims to the gratitude of the nation and to his master's favor which his rival was acquiring every day, had finally extorted Henri's consent to that treaty through the all-powerful influence of Diane de Poitiers.

The treaty was signed April 3, 1559. Although concluded in the full tide of victory, it was hardly advantageous to France.

She retained the three bishoprics Metz, Toul, and Verdun, with their dependencies ; she was to keep Calais for eight years only, and to pay eight hundred thousand crowns to Great Britain if the place was not restored within that period (but it never was restored, and the eight hundred thousand crowns were never paid). France regained possession of St. Quentin and Ham, and retained Turin and Pignerol in Piedmont.

But Philip II. obtained unconditional cession of the strong posts of Thionville, Mariembourg, and Hesdin. The walls of Théroouanne and Yvoy were razed. He caused the restitution of Bouillon to the bishopric of Liége, the Isle of Corsica to Genoa, and to Philibert of Savoy the greater part of Savoy and Piedmont, which had been conquered under François I. ; finally, he insisted upon his own marriage with the king's daughter Élisabeth, and that the Duke of Savoy should be united to the Princess Marguerite. These terms were very advantageous for him, and he could have demanded none more favorable even after the battle of St. Laurent.

The Duc de Guise, coming back in hot haste and furious with rage from the army, warmly and not unjustly accused Montmorency of treason, and the king of fatal weakness in having thus surrendered by a stroke of the pen what the Spanish forces had failed to wrest from France after thirty years of successful fighting.

But the harm was done, and the ominous discontent of Le Balafre was of no avail to repair it.

Gabriel found no satisfaction in this state of things. His vengeance pursued the man in the person of the king, not the king to the detriment of the nation. He would have been glad to avenge himself with his country behind him, but not against her.

However, he made a note in his mind of the natural

resentment of the Duc de Guise at seeing the sublime efforts of his genius paralyzed and rendered of no account by underhand intriguing.

The wrath of a Coriolanus might well, if occasion offered, serve to aid Gabriel's projects. Besides, François de Lorraine was not the only malcontent in the kingdom, — far from it.

One day Gabriel encountered near the Pré-aux-Clercs Baron de la Renaudie, whom he had not seen since the morning conference in the Rue St. Jacques.

Instead of avoiding a familiar face whenever he saw it approaching, as he had been in the habit of doing, Gabriel accosted the baron.

The two men seemed made to appreciate each other; they were much alike in more than one respect, — notably in steadfastness and energy of character. Both were born for action, and were passionately devoted to every just cause.

After exchanging salutations, La Renaudie said confidently, —

"Well, I have seen Master Ambroise Paré. You are one of us, are you not?"

"In heart, yes; but in appearance, no," Gabriel replied.

"And when may we expect that you will give yourself to our cause absolutely and without concealment?"

"I will no longer hold with you the selfish language which perhaps angered you against me," Gabriel replied. "On the other hand, I answer thus: I will be at your service when you need me, and when I no longer need you."

"That is generous, indeed!" was La Renaudie's response. "As a gentleman I admire, but as a party man I cannot hope to imitate you. However, if you but await

the moment when we need the help of all our friends, know that that moment has arrived."

"Pray, what has happened?" asked Gabriel.

"A secret blow is in preparation against those of the Religion. They propose to get rid of all the Protestants at once."

"What leads you to think so?"

"Why, they scarcely take pains to hide it," replied the baron. "Antoine Minard, President of the Parliament, said boldly at a council meeting at St. Germain that it was necessary to strike a decisive blow, if they did not wish to become a sort of republic like the Swiss States."

"What! he uttered the word 'republic'?" cried Gabriel, in surprise. "Doubtless he exaggerated the danger so that an exaggerated remedy might be applied."

"Not so much," rejoined La Renaudie, in a lower tone. "He did not exaggerate very much, in truth; for we, too, have changed our views somewhat since our meeting in Calvin's chamber, and Ambroise Paré's ideas do not seem so bold to us to-day; and then, you see, they are driving us to extreme measures."

"In that case," said Gabriel, eagerly, "I may be one of you sooner than I thought."

"That is pleasant to hear," cried La Renaudie.

"In what direction must I keep my eyes?" asked Gabriel.

"Upon the parliament," said the baron, "for there the issue will be joined. The Evangelical party has a strong minority there, — Anne Dubourg, Henri Dufaur, Nicolas Duval, Eustache de la Porte, and twenty others. To the harangues which call for the vigorous prosecution of heretics, the adherents of Calvinism reply by demanding the convocation of a general council to deal with religious

affairs in accordance with the terms of the decrees of Constance and Bâle. They have right on their side; therefore it will be necessary to use violence against them. But we are watching, and do you watch with us."

"Very well," said Gabriel.

"Remain at your house in Paris until you are notified that we have need of you," continued La Renaudie.

"That will be painful for me," observed Gabriel; "but I will do it, provided that you do not leave me to pine in idleness too long. You have written and talked enough, I should think, and now you ought to lay aside words for deeds."

"That is my opinion," rejoined La Renaudie. "Hold yourself in readiness, and be tranquil."

They parted, and Gabriel walked thoughtfully away.

In his thirst for vengeance, was he not allowing his conscience to go astray somewhat? Already it seemed to be driving him on toward civil war; but since events would not come to him, he must go to them.

That same day he returned to his house in the Rue des Jardins St. Paul, where he found his faithful Aloyse alone. Martin-Guerre was no longer there; André had remained with Madame de Castro; Jean and Babette Peuquoy had returned to Calais with the intention of going thence to St. Quentin, whose gates had been opened to the loyal weaver by the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis.

Thus the master's return to his lonesome abode was more melancholy even than usual. Ah, but did not the motherly old nurse love him enough for all? We despair of picturing the worthy creature's joy when Gabriel informed her that he had come to stay with her for some time in all probability. He lived in most absolute

secrecy and solitude, to be sure ; but he was there by her side, and very rarely left the house. Aloyse could feast her eyes on him, and wait upon him. It was a long time since she had been so happy.

Gabriel, smiling sadly upon her, envied her loving heart its happiness. Alas ! he could not share it with her. His life henceforth was even to himself a terrible enigma, of which he both dreaded and longed to know the solution.

Thus his days passed in impatience and apprehension, anxious and bored for more than a month.

As he had promised his nurse, he hardly ever left the house ; but sometimes in the evening he would go and prowl around the Châtelet, and on his return would shut himself up for hours at a time in the funeral vault, whither the unknown bearers had secretly brought his father's body.

Gabriel seemed to take a gloomy pleasure in going back thus to the day when the outrage had been put upon him, that he might keep up his courage with his wrath.

When he looked upon the forbidding walls of the Châtelet, but above all when he contemplated the marble tomb where the sufferings of that noble life had finally found rest, the terrible morning when he had closed the eyes of his murdered father came back to him in all its horror.

Then his hands would move convulsively, his hair stand on end, and his chest heave with passion ; and he would emerge from that terrible communion with the dead with his hatred renewed and more bitter than ever.

During such moments of anguish, Gabriel regretted having allowed his vengeance to follow in the wake of

circumstances, for it seemed insupportable to him to have to wait for it.

His blood boiled to think that while he was waiting so patiently his murderous enemies were triumphant and joyous. The king sat peaceably on his throne at the Louvre. The constable was growing rich on the miseries of the people, and Diane de Poitiers rioting in infamous debauchery.

This state of things could not last. Since God's vengeance was sleeping, and the sufferings of the oppressed were growing daily greater, Gabriel determined that he would do without the help of God or man, or rather that he would constitute himself the instrument of divine justice and of human wrath.

Thereupon, carried away by an irresistible impulse, he would place his hand on the hilt of his sword, and make a motion as if to go and seek his revenge.

But then his conscience would awake and remind him of Diane de Castro's letter, written at Calais, in which his beloved had implored him not to undertake to chastise with his own hand, and not to strike even the guilty unless he were to do it involuntarily, and by the will of God.

Then he would read again that affecting missive, and involuntarily let his sword fall back into its scabbard. Stricken with remorse, he would resign himself once more to wait.

Gabriel was one of those men who are born for action, but have not executive ability. His vigor and energy were marvellous when supported by an army, or a small party, or even one great man; but he was not fitted by nature to carry out extraordinary achievements alone, even for a good object, and still less when they were to end in a crime. He was neither a powerful prince nor a startling genius by birth, and the power and the will to take the initiative were equally lacking in him.

When beside Coligny, and again when with the Duc de Guise, he had accomplished marvellous exploits. But now, as he had given Martin-Guerre to understand, his task was a very different one ; instead of having enemies to fight in the open field, he had to chastise a king, and there was no one to assist him in that fearful work.

Nevertheless he still relied upon the same men who had formerly lent him their powerful aid, — Coligny the Protestant, and the ambitious Duc de Guise.

A civil war for the defence of religious truth, a revolution to assist in the triumph of a great genius, — such were the objects of Gabriel's secret hopes. The death or deposition of Henri II., or at all events his punishment, would be the result of either of the uprisings. Gabriel would show himself in the second rank, but as one worthy to be in the first. He would faithfully keep the oath he had sworn to the king himself ; he would visit his perjury upon his children and his children's children.

If these two chances failed him, then he would have no other resource but to leave everything to God.

But it seemed at first as if these two chances were not likely to fail him. One day, it was the 13th of June, 1559, Gabriel received two letters almost at the same time.

The first was handed to him about five o'clock in the afternoon by a mysterious individual, who refused to deliver it except to himself in person, and would not deliver it to him until he had compared his features with the details of an exact description.

This letter read as follows : —

FRIEND AND BROTHER, — The hour has come ; the persecutors have thrown away their masks. Let us thank God ! Martyrdom leads to victory.

This evening at nine o'clock call at the house with a brown door, Number 11 Place Maubert.

You must strike three blows upon the door at regular intervals. A man will open it and will say to you, "Do not enter, for you cannot see clearly." You will reply, "I have my light with me." He will then lead you to a stairway with seventeen steps, which you must ascend in darkness. At the top another acolyte will thus accost you, "What do you seek?" Reply, "What is right." You will then be shown into an unfurnished room where some one will whisper in your ear the password, "Genève," to which you will reply with the counter-sign, "Gloire." Thereupon you will be at once conducted to those *who have need of you to-day*.

Till this evening, friend and brother, prudence and courage. Burn this letter.

L. R.

Gabriel called for a lighted lamp, burned the letter in the messenger's presence, and replied simply, —

"I will be there."

The man bowed and withdrew.

"Well," said Gabriel, "at last the Reformers are losing their patience."

About eight o'clock, as he was still deep in thought concerning La Renaudie's summons, Aloyse entered his room with a page in the Lorraine livery.

He brought a letter which read thus : —

MONSIEUR AND DEAR FRIEND, — I have been six weeks at Paris, having taken my leave of the army, where there was nothing more for me to do. I am assured that you also have been at home for some time. Why have I not seen you? Have you forgotten me in these days of short memories and ingratitude? No, I know you too well; it is impossible.

Come to me, pray. I will expect you, if you please, to-morrow morning at ten in my apartments at the Tournelles.

Come, if only that we may condole with each other on the profit that has been made of our success.

Your very affectionate friend,

FRANÇOIS DE LORRAINE.

"I will be there," said Gabriel to the page.

When the boy had withdrawn, —

"Well, well," he thought, "the ambitious man too is awake."

Thus encouraged by a twofold hope, he set out a quarter of an hour later for the Place Maubert.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PROTESTANT CONVENTICLE.

THE house Number 11 Place Maubert, where La Renaudie had appointed a rendezvous with Gabriel, belonged to an advocate named Trouillard. It was already vaguely pointed at among the people as a place of resort for heretics; and the fact that psalms were sometimes heard sung there in the evening gave some credibility to these dangerous rumors. But after all they were only rumors, and it had never occurred to the police to investigate them.

Gabriel had no difficulty in finding the brown door, and following his instructions, he knocked three times at regular intervals.

The door opened as if of itself, but a hand seized Gabriel's in the darkness within, and a voice said, —

“Do not enter, for you cannot see clearly.”

“I have my light with me,” replied Gabriel, following the formula prescribed by the letter.

“Enter, then,” said the voice, “and follow the hand that guides you.”

Gabriel obeyed, and took a few steps in that way; then the hand released its hold, and the voice said, —

“Go on by yourself now.”

Gabriel felt with his foot the first step of a staircase; he ascended, counting seventeen steps, then stopped.

“What do you seek?” said a different voice.

"What is right," was his reply.

A door opened at once in front of him, and he entered a room very dimly lighted.

A man was there alone; he approached Gabriel and said in a low tone, —

"Genève."

"Gloire," returned the young count at once.

The man then struck a bell, and La Renaudie himself entered by a concealed door.

He came directly to Gabriel and pressed his hand affectionately.

"Do you know what took place in parliament to-day?" he asked.

"I have not left my house until now," replied Gabriel.

"You will learn all about it here, then," said La Renaudie. "You have not yet bound yourself to us, but no matter; we will bind ourselves to you. You shall know our plans, and our strength; there shall be nothing concealed from you henceforth in the affairs of our party, while you may remain free to act alone or with us as you choose. You have told me that you were one of us in spirit, and that is sufficient. I do not even ask your word as a gentleman not to disclose anything that you may see or hear. With you it is a needless precaution."

"Thanks for your confidence," said Gabriel, much affected. "I will give you no cause to repent it."

"Come in with me," continued La Renaudie, "and stay by my side; I will tell you the names of those of our brethren whom you do not know. You can judge for yourself of everything else. Come."

He took Gabriel's hand, pressed the secret spring of the concealed door, and together they entered a large oblong hall, where about two hundred persons were gathered.

A few torches scattered here and there cast only a dim light upon the moving groups. Otherwise there was no furniture, nor hangings, nor seats; a common wooden pulpit for the preacher or orator, — that was all.

The presence of a score or so of women explained, but did not justify (let us hasten to say), the scandalous reports which were spread among the Catholics as to these secret nocturnal meetings of the Reformers.

No one noticed the entrance of Gabriel and his guide. All eyes and all thoughts were fixed upon him who stood on the rostrum at that moment, a sectary of sad mien and grave speech.

La Renaudie told Gabriel his name.

“It is Nicolas Duval, a councillor of parliament,” he said beneath his breath. “He is just beginning to describe what took place to-day at the Augustins. Listen.”

And Gabriel listened.

“Our regular place of meeting at the palace,” the orator continued, “being occupied by the preparations for the celebration of Princess Élisabeth’s marriage, we sat temporarily for the first time at the Augustins; and in some mysterious way the appearance of that unaccustomed apartment made us from the very first feel a vague presentiment that something out of the usual course would occur.

“However, Giles Lemaître, the president, opened the sitting in the customary form; and there seemed to be nothing to justify the apprehensions by which some of us had been disturbed.

“The question that had been discussed the Wednesday preceding was reopened. It related to the regulation of religious opinion. Antoine Fumée, Paul de Foix, and Eustache de la Porte spoke successively in favor of toleration, and their eloquent and vigorous language

seemed to have made a marked impression on the majority.

"Eustache de la Porte resumed his seat amid loud applause, and Henri Dufaur was just opening his mouth to complete the conquest of those who were still hesitating, when suddenly the great door opened, and the usher of parliament announced in a loud voice, 'The king!'

"The president did not seem in the least surprised, but descended hastily from his chair to meet the king. All the members arose in confusion, some altogether amazed, others very calm, as if they quite anticipated the event.

"The king entered, accompanied by the Cardinal de Lorraine and the constable.

" 'I do not come to disturb your labors, Messieurs of the parliament,' he said in the first place, 'but to assist them.'

"After a few meaningless compliments, he concluded his remarks thus:—

" 'Peace has been concluded with Spain; but the fomenters of scandalous heresies have taken advantage of the wars in which we have been engaged to gain a foothold in the kingdom; and they must be stamped out, now that the war is over. Why have you not ratified the edict against the Lutherans which I caused to be submitted to you? However, I repeat, go on freely in my presence with the deliberations you have already begun.'

"Henri Dufaur, who had the floor, boldly resumed his speech at the king's command, pleaded earnestly for liberty of conscience, and even ventured to add to his outspoken discourse some sorrowful but severe strictures upon the measures adopted by the king's government.

" 'Do you complain of disturbances?' he cried. 'Very well, we know their author. I might reply as Elias replied to Ahab, "It is thou who tormentest Israel!"'

"Hear H. on the eye and turned pale, but said nothing.

"Then Secretary Cox and Vice-President W. all went quiet and waiting contemplation.

"I remember, now," said H., "that there are certain things which should be generally provided, such as adequate machinery and property, and which are essential every day about the ordinary administration of the State. But of what are the most essential and are there to be in the hands of the Government? Is it of the people? They would have the sense of the people in their property. They have some general education in general.

"But I remember they have discovered the great idea and the essential character of the Government, by the light of the Holy Scriptures and because they have discovered that they should be returned, have they received a lesson which makes them worthy of the State?"

"But that they never turned, but we would not that he was not suffering seriously in a matter of religious.

"Then Secretary, the President, looking down, as he said his next words.

"I am almost certain," said he, "that I should not give. Let us not wait then as with the Almighty, perhaps I might be tempted to have in our day."

"The richest language perhaps never our count before that the more excellent character of our friends. It seems almost that the last word would be at least greatly balanced.

"Hear H. remembered that, and determined to carry everything with a sudden *coup d'état*.

"Now we is President a right," said he; "we must put us and in these matters, or they will escape us. To say a word, however is President, we must not seem to be moved in the eye."

“With his finger he pointed out Henri Dufaur and Anne Dubourg, and then hurriedly left the hall, as if he could no longer contain himself.

“I need not tell you, friends and brothers, that Monsieur de Montmorency obeyed the king’s orders. Dubourg and Dufaur were seized and carried away while occupying their seats as councillors of parliament, and we were left in utter consternation.

“Giles Lemaitre alone found courage to speak : —

“‘It is just,’ said he. ‘So may all those be punished who dare to fail of respect to the majesty of royalty !’

“But as if to give the lie to his words, the guards at that moment entered the hall, and proceeded to execute orders which they produced, by arresting De Foix, Fumée, and De la Porte, all of whom had spoken before the king appeared at all, and had confined themselves to defending the principle of toleration in matters of religion, without suggesting the least reproach against the sovereign.

“Thus it became evident that it was not for their remonstrances uttered in the king’s presence, but simply for their religious opinions, that five members of parliament, inviolable by law, had been charged with a capital crime, by means of a shameful subterfuge.”

Nicolas Duval ceased to speak. Mutterings of grief and anger had interrupted him twenty times, only to follow more closely than ever his description of that momentous and stormy session, which to us at this distance in time seems as if it must have been told of another assembly, and bears a startling resemblance to scenes that were enacted two hundred and thirty years later.

But there was this important difference, — that at the later epoch it was liberty and not royalty which had the last word to say !

The minister David followed Nicolas Duval upon the rostrum.

"Brothers," said he, "before we take counsel together, let us lift up our voices and our hearts to God with a psalm, that He may quicken the spirit of truth in us."

"Psalm forty!" cried several voices in the assemblage, and they all began to sing the stirring words of that psalm.

It was an extraordinary selection to calm excited imaginations. It was much more like a strain of menace, it must be confessed, than like a prayer for guidance.

But wrath was uppermost at that moment in those sturdy souls, and it was with marvellous impressiveness that all present joined in singing these verses, in which the lack of poetic talent was replaced by the emotion which animated them:—

"Gens insensés, où avez-vous les cœurs
De faire guerre à Jésus-Christ ?
Pour soutenir cet Ante-Christ,
Jusques à quand serez persécuteurs ?
Traîtres abominables !
Le service des diables,
Vous allez soutenant :
Et de Dieu les édits
Par vous sont interdits
A tout homme vivant." ¹

¹ "Ye men of wrath, why thus conspire ye
To wage mad war against your Saviour Christ,
By showing favor to this Anti-Christ,
Till ye yourselves shall persecutors be ?
Ye doers of evil,
The works of the Devil,
You thus are upholding :
And with impious hands
From the Lord's high commands
Are the people withholding."

The last stanza was especially significant : —

“ N’empêchez plus la prédication,
De la parole et vive voix
De notre Dieu, le roi des rois !
Ou vous verrez sa malédiction,
Sur vous, prompte s’étendre,
Qui vous fera descendre
Aux enfers ténébreux,
Où vous serez punis
Des maux qu’avez commis
Par tourmens douloureux.”¹

The psalm at an end, it was as if this appeal to God had relieved the oppressed heart at once ; silence was restored, and the assemblage was in readiness to deliberate.

La Renaudie was the first to speak, in order to state concisely the condition of affairs and its import.

“ Brothers,” said he, from where he stood on the floor, “ being thus brought face to face with an unprecedented proceeding which overturns all preconceived notions of right and justice, we have now to decide what course of conduct should be adopted by the adherents of the Reformed religion. Shall we still suffer our burdens patiently, or shall we act ? Such are the questions which each one of us must propound to his own conscience and answer according to its dictates. You see that our oppressors propose nothing less than a general massacre, and

¹ “ No longer now, with loud unseemly noise,
Seek to delay the utterance of the word
Of the great King of Kings, our God the Lord !
Else shall His malediction from the skies,
Upon ye descending,
To woe never-ending
In hell’s darkest recess
Consign ye, to languish
In torment and anguish
Your sins to redress.”

propose to strike us out from the list of the living, as one erases a badly written word from a manuscript. Shall we wait like sheep for the fatal blow; or shall we rather (since law and justice are thus violated by those very persons whose sacred duty it is to protect them) try to do justice with our own hands, and to that end temporarily substitute force for law? It is for you to reply, friends and brothers."

La Renaudie made a short pause, as if to afford time for all their intellects to digest the momentous question; then he resumed, desirous at once to facilitate and hasten the conclusion:—

"Those whom the cause of religion and of truth should band together are unfortunately, as we all know, divided into two factions,—that of Geneva, and that of the nobility; but when face to face with danger and a common foe, it is fitting, it seems to me, that we should have only one heart and one will. The members of both factions are alike invited to state their opinions and suggest the remedies that occur to them. The advice which offers the best chance of success should be unanimously adopted, from whatever quarter it comes; and now, my friends and brothers, speak freely and confidently."

La Renaudie's speech was followed by a considerable period of hesitation.

Those who listened to him were lacking in just those two qualities, courage and confidence; and in the first instance, notwithstanding the bitter indignation which really filled all their hearts, the power of royalty then enjoyed such great prestige that the Reformers, who were novices at conspiring, did not dare to express at once and without reserve their ideas on the subject of armed rebellion. They were devoted to their opinions, and determined as a body; but each individual recoiled before the

responsibility of striking the first blow. They were all ready to follow, but no one dared to lead.

Then, too, as La Renaudie had said, they were suspicious of one another; neither of the two parties knew whither the other would lead it; and their objects were, in truth, too dissimilar to make the choice of roads and guides a matter of indifference to them.

The Geneva faction were really aiming at the foundation of a republic, while that of the nobility simply desired to bring about a change of dynasty.

The elective forms of Calvinism, the principle of equality which was everywhere inculcated by the new church, tended directly toward the republican system as it was in vogue in the Swiss cantons; but the nobility did not wish to go so far, and would have been content, in accordance with the advice of Elizabeth of England, to depose Henri II., and replace him with a Calvinist king. The Prince de Condé's name was whispered about as a suitable selection.

It would be difficult to imagine two more diametrically opposed elements co-operating in a common cause.

Therefore, Gabriel saw regretfully that after La Renaudie's address the two almost hostile camps eyed each other askance, without appearing to think of drawing conclusions from the premises he had so boldly laid down.

A moment or two passed in this unfortunate indecision, amid a confused murmuring of many voices. La Renaudie could but ask himself whether he had not, by being too blunt and outspoken, unwittingly done away with all the effect of Nicolas Duval's recital; but having started on that course, he determined to put everything to the touch, to win or lose all, and so he thus addressed a thin, puny little man with bristling eyebrows and bilious appearance, who made one of a group near him: —

"Well, Lignières, are you not going to speak to our brothers, and tell them what you have at heart?"

"So be it!" replied the little man, and his gloomy countenance lighted up. "I will speak; but I will not yield an inch, or extenuate anything."

"Go on, — you are among friends," said La Renaudie.

While Lignières was on his way to the rostrum the baron whispered to Gabriel, —

"That is a dangerous instrument to make use of. Lignières is a fanatic, — whether in good or bad faith I know not, — who urges everything to extremes, and is always more repellent than attractive. But no matter! We must know at any price what we have to rely upon, must we not?"

"Yes," said Gabriel, "so that all these closed hearts may open to emit the truth."

"Lignières and his doctrines hot from Geneva will wake them up, never fear," rejoined La Renaudie.

The orator plunged at once *in medias res*.

"The law has brought about its own condemnation," said he. "What resource remains? An appeal to force, and nothing else. You ask what we ought to do! If I do not reply to that question, here is something which will reply for me."

He held up a silver medal.

"This medal," he continued, "is far more eloquent than any words of mine. For the benefit of those who are too far away to see it I will say what it represents. It bears the image of a flaming sword cutting off the blossom of a lily, whose stalk bends and falls near by; the sceptre and the crown are rolling in the dust."

Then he added, as if he feared that he might be misunderstood, —

"Medals ordinarily serve to commemorate accomplished facts; may this one serve as prophetic of something yet to occur! I will say no more."

Indeed, he had said enough. He came down from the pulpit amid the plaudits of an inconsiderable portion of the assembly, and the mutterings of a much larger number.

But the general attitude was of stupefied silence.

"Well," said La Renaudie, in a low voice, to Gabriel, "that is clearly not the right chord to strike. We must try another."

"Monsieur le Baron de Castelnau," he continued aloud, addressing a young man of thoughtful appearance and handsomely clad, who was leaning against the wall ten feet from him, — "Monsieur de Castelnau, have you not a word to say to us?"

"I might perhaps have had nothing to say independently; but I should like to say a word or two in reply," the young man responded.

"We are all attention," said La Renaudie.

"This young man," he added, speaking in Gabriel's ear again, "belongs to the party of the nobility; and you should have seen him at the Louvre the day you brought the news of the capture of Calais. Castelnau is frank, loyal, and brave. He will set up his flag as boldly as Lignières, and we shall see if he will be received any more warmly."

Castelnau mounted one of the steps of the rostrum, and spoke from that slight elevation.

"I will begin," he said, "like the orators who have preceded me. We have been iniquitously attacked; let us use like weapons to defend ourselves. Let us do in the open field, amid the panoply of war, what they have done in parliament among the red robes! But I differ

in opinion from Monsieur de Lignières as to the rest. I, too, have a medal to show you. Here it is ; it is not his. From a distance it seems to you to resemble the crowns from the royal mint which we carry in our purses, and in fact, like them, it does bear the stamp of a crowned head ; but in lieu of ‘Henricus II., rex Galliaë,’ its legend reads, ‘Ludovicus XIII., rex Galliaë.’¹ I have done.”

The Baron de Castelnau left his place with his head proudly erect. His allusion to the Prince de Condé was flagrant. Those who had applauded Lignières muttered at his words, and *vice versa*.

But the large majority of those present were still motionless and speechless between the two minorities.

“What do they want, pray ?” Gabriel softly asked La Renaudie.

“I am afraid that they don’t want anything,” was the baron’s reply.

At that moment the advocate Des Avenelles asked a hearing.

“This is their man, I fancy,” La Renaudie remarked. “Des Avenelles is my host when I am in Paris, — an honest and sagacious fellow, but too cautious, almost to timidity even. His word will be law with them.”

Des Avenelles from the beginning justified La Renaudie’s prediction.

Said he : “We have listened to many bold and even audacious words ; but has the moment really arrived to utter them ? Are we not going a little too fast ? We are shown a very worthy and lofty purpose, but not a word is said as to the means of attaining it. They must needs be criminal. My heart is more oppressed by the severities

¹ These two rare and curious medals are to be seen to-day in the “Cabinet des Médailles.”

to which we are subjected than that of any other member of this assemblage. But when we have so many prejudices to overcome, should we add to the burden by casting upon the cause of our religion the odium of an assassination?—yes, of an assassination; for you cannot obtain by any other means the result which you dare to propose.”

Des Avenelles was interrupted by almost unanimous applause.

“What did I say?” whispered La Renaudie. “This advocate is the real expositor of their views.”

Des Avenelles continued, —

“The king is in the very bloom and flower of his vigor. To wrest the throne from him, he must be hurled headlong from it. What living man would take upon himself that act of violence? Kings are divine, and God only has the right to govern them. Ah, suppose that some accident, some unforeseen ill, some blow struck by a private hand, should take away the king’s life at this moment, and leave the guardianship of an infant monarch in the hands of those arrogant subjects who are our veritable oppressors!—then it would be this guardianship, and not royalty itself, the Guises and not François II., against whom our attacks would be directed. Civil war would be not only justifiable but laudable, and revolution a sacred duty, and I would be the first to cry, ‘To arms!’”

This energetic moderation moved the assembly to admiration; and fresh tokens of approbation were showered upon Des Avenelles as a recompense for his prudent courage.

“Ah!” muttered La Renaudie to Gabriel, “I regret now having asked you to come, for you will begin to compassionate us.”

But Gabriel, lost in thought, was saying to himself, —

“No, I have no right to reproach them for their weakness, for it is much like my own. While I was secretly relying upon them, they seem to have been relying upon me.”

“What do you mean to do, pray?” cried La Renaudie to his triumphant host.

“To maintain a legal attitude and wait!” replied the advocate, firmly. “Anne Dubourg, Henri Dufaur, and three others of our friends in parliament have been arrested; but who says that they will dare to convict them, or even to accuse them? My opinion is that any overt act of violence on our part would result simply in provoking reprisals on the part of those in authority. And who knows that our moderation may not be the salvation of the victims? Let us have the tranquillity of conscious strength, and the dignity which befits a righteous cause. Let us leave all the wrong-doing to our persecutors. Let us wait. When they see that we are moderate in our demands, but resolute, they will think twice before declaring war upon us, — just as I implore you, friends and brothers, to think twice before you give them the signal for reprisals.”

Des Avenelles ceased, and the applause was renewed.

The advocate, vain of his success, desired to confirm his victory.

“Let all who agree with me raise their hand,” he added.

Almost every hand was raised to assure Des Avenelles that he had spoken the mind of the gathering.

“Let us see, then,” said he: “our decision is —”

“To decide nothing at all,” interposed Castelnau.

“To postpone until a more favorable moment any extreme measures,” Des Avenelles concluded, casting an angry glance at the interrupter.

The minister David suggested singing another psalm to beseech God to deliver the poor prisoners.

"Come, let us be going," said La Renaudie to Gabriel; "all this annoys and angers me. These people only know how to sing. They have nothing seditious but their psalms."

When they were on the street they walked along in silence, both deeply absorbed in their reflections.

At the Pont Notre Dame they parted, La Renaudie returning to the Faubourg St. Germain, and Gabriel going toward the Arsenal.

"Adieu, Monsieur d'Exmès," said the former. "I am sorry to have caused you to waste your time thus. But believe me, I pray, when I assure you that this is not our last word. The prince, Coligny, and some of our most reliable heads were absent this evening."

"My time with you has not been wasted," replied Gabriel. "You will be convinced of that very shortly."

"So much the better, so much the better," rejoined La Renaudie. "Nevertheless, I doubt—"

"Have no doubt at all," said Gabriel. "It was necessary for me to know if the Protestants were really beginning to lose patience. It is of more use to me than you can imagine to have learned that they are not tired out yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

ANOTHER TRIAL

THE disaffection of the Protestants having failed him, there remained still one more hope of assistance for Gabriel in his thirst for vengeance; namely, that furnished by the ambition of the Duc de Guise.

Consequently he was very prompt the next morning at ten o'clock in keeping the appointment François de Lorraine had made with him at the Tournelles.

It was evident that the young Comte de Montgomery was expected; for as soon as his name was announced he was shown into the presence of him who was now called the conqueror of Calais, thanks to Gabriel's daring scheme.

Le Balafre came eagerly forward to meet him, and grasped both his hands affectionately.

"Ah, here you are at last, my forgetful friend," said he. "I have been obliged to send for you, to follow you into your retirement, and if I had not done so God only knows when I should have seen you! Why is it? Why have you not been to visit me since my return?"

"Monseigneur," said Gabriel, in a low tone, "much distressing anxiety —"

"Ah! There it is! I was sure of it!" the duke interrupted him. "So they were false, were they, to the promises they made you? They deceived you, and insulted and tormented you. Oh, I was very suspicious

that there was some infamy at the bottom of it all! My brother, the Cardinal de Lorraine, who was present when you arrived at the Louvre from Calais, and heard you spoken of as the Comte de Montgommery, imagined, with his priestly keenness, that you were destined to be the dupe or the victim of those people. Why did you not apply to him? He might have been of some assistance to you in my absence."

"I thank you, Monseigneur," replied Gabriel, gravely, "but you are mistaken, I assure you. All their promises to me were redeemed with the utmost exactitude."

"Oho, but you have such a way of saying it, my friend!"

"I speak as I feel, Monseigneur; but I will repeat that I make no complaints, and that the promises upon which I relied have been fulfilled — to the letter. So let us talk no more of my affairs, I beg, for you know that that subject of conversation was never agreeable to me, and it is to-day more painful than ever. I ask you, Monseigneur, in pity not to insist upon your kindly meant inquiries."

The duke was struck with Gabriel's dolorous tone.

"Very well, my friend," said he; "I shall be afraid now of touching unintentionally upon some one of your scarcely healed scars, and I will question you no further about yourself."

"Thanks, Monseigneur," was Gabriel's reply, in a dignified tone, by no means free from emotion.

"But I wish you to be sure of this," continued Le Balafre, "that at all times and places, and for any purpose whatsoever, my influence, my fortune, and my life are at your service, Gabriel; and that if I am ever to be so fortunate as that you should need my help, you have but to hold out your hand to grasp mine."

"Thanks, Monseigneur," Gabriel said again.

"That being agreed between us," said the duke, "on what subject is it your pleasure that we should converse?"

"Why, of yourself, Monseigneur," replied the young count, — "of your glory and of your future plans; those are the subjects which interest me. In them you will find the magnet which has drawn me to you in all haste at your first call."

"My glory? my plans for the future?" retorted François de Lorraine, with a shake of the head. "Alas! those are gloomy subjects of conversation for me as well."

"What mean you, Monseigneur?" Gabriel exclaimed.

"What I say, my friend. Yes, I confess that I did think I had won some renown; it seemed to me that my name deserved to be pronounced with some respect in France to-day, and with a certain degree of awe throughout Europe. And since my not unworthy past made it my duty to think of the future, I was forming plans based upon my reputation, and dreaming of great achievements, — great for my country, and for myself as well. I would have accomplished them, I have faith to believe —"

"Well, Monseigneur?" said Gabriel, inquiringly.

"Well, Gabriel, since my return to this court six months since, I have ceased to believe in my glory, and have abandoned all my plans."

"Why so, in God's name?"

"Why, in the first place, don't you know of the shameful treaty with which they have crowned our victories? If we had been forced to raise the siege of Calais, if the English still had the gateways of France in their hands, — in short, if defeat at all points had demonstrated the

insufficiency or incompetency of our forces, and the impossibility of continuing an unequal conflict, we could not have been asked to sign a more unfavorable and dishonorable treaty than that of Cateau-Cambrésis."

"That is true, Monseigneur," Gabriel remarked; "and every one grieves to think that such a magnificent harvest yielded so little fruit."

"Oh, well," rejoined the duke, "how can you expect me to sow for people who know so little about reaping? And then, too, have they not forced me to remain ingloriously idle by this glorious peace of theirs? There is my sword, doomed for a long time to rust in its scabbard. War everywhere at an end, at whatever cost, puts an end at the same time to my fair dreams of glory; and between ourselves that was one of the main objects sought to be accomplished."

"But you are no less mighty even in this forced inaction, Monseigneur," said Gabriel. "You are respected at court, worshipped by the people, and dreaded by foreign nations."

"Yes, I believe I am beloved at home, and feared abroad," Le Balafre replied; "but do not tell me, my friend, that I am respected at the Louvre. While they are thus publicly reducing to nought the certain results of our success, they are threatening my private influence as well. When I returned from the North, whom did I find in greater favor than ever? That insolent, beaten hound of St. Laurent fame, — that Montmorency, whom I detest!"

"Oh, no more than I do, surely!" muttered Gabriel.

"It was by his influence and for his own purposes that this peace for which we are all blushing was concluded. Not content with thus making my efforts appear of less account, he was very careful to look after his own inter-

ests in the treaty, and to have the amount of his ransom after being taken prisoner at St. Laurent repaid to him, — for the second or third time, I believe! To such a degree does he speculate upon his defeat and disgrace.”

“And does the Duc de Guise enter upon a rivalry with such as he?” asked Gabriel, with a disdainful smile.

“He shudders at the thought, my friend; but you can see that it is forced upon him! You can see that Monsieur le Connétable is protected by something stronger than glory or renown, — by some person more powerful than the king himself! You can see that my services can never equal those of Madame Diane de Poitiers, whom may the lightning wither!”

“Oh, that God might listen to you!” muttered Gabriel.

“What has that woman done to the king, in Heaven’s name?” continued the duke. “Are the people really in the right when they speak of philters and charms? For my part, I believe that they are bound together by some stronger tie than love. It cannot be passion alone which thus indissolubly connects them; it must be fellowship in crime. I would swear that remorse has a place among their souvenirs of the past, and that they are more than lovers, — they are accomplices!”

The Comte de Montgomery shivered from head to foot.

“Do you not agree with me, Gabriel?” Le Balafre asked him.

“I do, indeed, Monseigneur,” replied Gabriel, in a hollow voice.

“And to put the finishing touch to my humiliation,” the duke went on, “do you know, my friend, what reward I found awaiting me here at Paris, over and above the

monstrous treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis? The immediate revocation of my appointment as lieutenant-general of the kingdom. These extraordinary functions became unnecessary in time of peace, so I was told; and without a word of warning, without even a word of thanks, they erased that title, just as one throws upon the dust-heap a piece of drapery which is of no further use."

"Is it possible that no more consideration than that was shown you?" cried Gabriel, desirous to add fuel to the fire which was burning in that incensed heart.

"Why should they show more consideration to a superfluous servant?" said the duke, with clinched teeth. "As for Monsieur de Montmorency, that is another affair altogether. He was and he remains constable. That, mind you, is an honor of which they do not think of depriving him, and which he has earned by forty years of defeat and failure! Oh, by the cross of Lorraine, if the war-wind blows again, they may come and go on their knees to me and implore me, and call me the savior of my country! I will send them to their constable then; let him save them if he can. That is his business, and the duty that devolves upon the office he holds. But for myself, since they condemn me to idleness, I accept the sentence, and will take my ease until the dawn of better days."

Gabriel, after a pause, replied with much gravity of manner, —

"This determination on your part is a grievous one, Monseigneur, and I greatly deplore it; for I was just about to make a proposition to you —"

"Useless, my friend, useless!" exclaimed Le Balafré. "My mind is made up. And then, too, I repeat, and you know it as well as I, the peace has taken from us every hope of renown."

"Pardon, Monseigneur," rejoined Gabriel, "but the peace is the one thing that makes my plan feasible."

"Really?" said François de Lorraine, tempted in spite of himself. "Pray, is it some bold stroke like the siege of Calais?"

"Something still bolder, Monseigneur."

"How can that be?" exclaimed the duke. "Upon my word, you have succeeded in arousing my curiosity thoroughly."

"May I tell you about it, then?"

"To be sure you may; in fact, I beg you to do so."

"Are we quite alone?"

"Entirely; not a living soul is within the sound of our voices."

"Well, then, Monseigneur," Gabriel began resolutely, "this is what I have to say to you: This king and this constable choose to dispense with your services; why do not you dispense with them? They have ejected you from the office of lieutenant-general of the kingdom; assume it once more on your own responsibility."

"How do you mean? Explain yourself!" said the duke.

"Monseigneur, foreign princes fear you, the people adore you, and the army is at your command to a man; you are already more of a king in France than the king himself. You are king by right of genius, he only because the crown is on his head. Dare to speak with the voice of a master, and the nation will listen to you like obedient subjects. Will Henri II. be any stronger in the Louvre than you in your camp? He who now speaks to you will be proud and happy to be the first to address you as 'your Majesty.'"

"Well, this is an audacious and daring scheme of yours, Gabriel," commented the Duc de Guise.

But he did not give the least sign of irritation ; on the contrary, his features wore a smile under their simulated expression of surprise.

"If it is an audacious scheme, it is a heart of extraordinary daring to which I propose it," replied Gabriel, firmly. "I speak for the good of France. We need a great man for king. Is it not calamitous that all your ideas of grandeur and of conquest should be thus disgracefully impeded by the caprice of a wanton and the jealousy of a favorite? If you were once at the helm with unfettered hands, where would your genius stop? You would renew the glory of Charlemagne."

"You know the house of Lorraine can trace its descent from him!" said Le Balafré, eagerly.

"Who could doubt it after seeing you in action?" replied Gabriel. "Be in your turn another Hugh Capet for the Valois."

"Yes, but suppose I should be only a Constable de Bourbon?"

"You slander yourself, Monseigneur. The Constable de Bourbon called foreigners to his assistance, — foes they were too. You need make use of none but your own country's forces."

"But where are these forces, which, according to you, are at my disposal?" asked Le Balafré.

"Two parties are offered to you," was Gabriel's reply.

"Who are they, pray? — for you see I allow you to go on, as if all this were something more than a mere figment of your imagination. Who are these two parties?"

"The army and the Protestants, Monseigneur," Gabriel answered. "You have it in your power to assume the position of a military chieftain at once."

"A usurper!" exclaimed Le Balafré.

"Say a conqueror! But if you would prefer, Monseigneur, be the king of the Huguenots."

"How about the Prince de Condé?" said the duke, smiling.

"He is fascinating and clever, but you are great and brilliant. Do you suppose that Calvin would hesitate between you? — and there is no doubt that the son of the cooper of Noyon is the dictator of his party. Say one word, and to-morrow you have at your command thirty thousand Reformers."

"But I am a Catholic prince, Gabriel."

"Glory is the true religion of heroes like yourself, Monseigneur."

"I should involve myself in trouble at Rome."

"That will be an excuse for making yourself her master."

"Ah, my friend, my friend!" rejoined the duke, looking keenly at Gabriel, "you hate Henri II. bitterly!"

"As much as I love you, I confess," said the youth, with noble frankness.

"I prize your sincerity, Gabriel," said Le Balafre, with a more serious manner; "and to prove it to you, I will lay bare my heart to you."

"And my heart will close its door forever upon what you may confide to it."

"Listen, then," continued the duke. "I will confess that I have before now sometimes dreamed of this end which you suggest to me to-day. But I think you will agree with me, my friend, in this, that when one sets out with such a goal in view, he should at least be reasonably sure of reaching it, and that to hazard such a step prematurely is to invite destruction."

"True," replied Gabriel.

"Very well," the duke went on, "do you really consider that the time is ripe for the fulfilment of my ambi-

tion? Preparations for so momentous a stroke should be made long beforehand, and men's minds must be made up and ready to second them. Now, do you believe that the people have accustomed themselves in advance, so to speak, to the idea of a change of dynasty?"

"They are accustomed to it," said Gabriel.

"I doubt it," returned the duke. "I have commanded armies, have defended Metz and taken Calais, and have twice been lieutenant-general of the kingdom; but all that is not sufficient. I have not yet come near enough to royal power. Doubtless there are discontents, but factions are not a people. Henri II. is young, clever, and brave, and he is the son of François I. There is no such danger in delay as to make one dream of dispossessing him."

"And so you hesitate, Monseigneur?" asked Gabriel.

"I do more than that, my friend, I refuse," replied Le Balafre. "Ah, if Henri II. should die suddenly to-morrow, by accident or disease —"

"So he thinks of that as well!" said Gabriel to himself. "Well, Monseigneur, if that unexpected blow should fall, what would you do?" he continued aloud.

"Then," rejoined the duke, "with a young and inexperienced king, altogether under my influence, I would become in some sort the regent of the kingdom. And if the queen-mother or Monsieur le Connétable undertook to act in opposition to me; if the Protestants raised a revolution, — if, in short, the State should be in danger and needed a firm hand at the helm, opportunities would arise of themselves, and I should become almost necessary. In such a case your scheme might be very welcome, my friend, and I would gladly hearken to you."

"But until then," said Gabriel, — "until this very improbable death of the king?"

"I will resign myself to wait, my friend, and will content myself with preparations for the future. And if the seeds sown in my mind bear fruit only for my son, it will be because God so willed it."

"Is this your last word, Monseigneur?"

"It is my last word," replied the duke. "But I am no less grateful to you, Gabriel, for having had this confidence in my destiny."

"And I, Monseigneur, am grateful to you for having had so much confidence in my discretion."

"Yes," rejoined the duke; "it is understood that all that has passed between us is as if it had never been said."

"Now I will take my leave," said Gabriel, rising.

"What, already!" exclaimed the duke.

"Yes, Monseigneur, I have learned what I desired to know. I will remember your words; they are safely buried in my heart, yet I will remember them. Excuse me, but it was essential for me to ascertain whether the royal ambition of the Duc de Guise was still slumbering. Adieu, Monseigneur."

"*Au revoir*, my friend."

Gabriel left the Tournelles even more gloomy and anxious than when he had entered there.

"So," said he to himself, "both the human auxiliaries upon whom I thought I could rely have failed me. I have none but God to look to now!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A PERILOUS STEP.

DIANE DE CASTRO in her apartments in the royal palace was meanwhile leading a miserable existence of grief and mortal terror.

Yet every tie was not broken that bound her to him who had loved her so dearly. Almost every week André the page was sent to the Rue des Jardins St. Paul, to make inquiries of Aloyse concerning Gabriel's welfare.

The information which he brought back to Diane was far from reassuring. The young Comte de Montgommery was always the same, — moody and anxious and gloomy. The good nurse could not speak of him that her eyes did not fill with tears, and her cheeks lose their color.

Diane hesitated for a long while. Finally, one morning during this same month of June she took a decided step in order to put an end to her dread.

She wrapped herself in a very modest cloak, hid her face under a veil, and left the Louvre at an hour when people were scarcely stirring there, accompanied by André alone, with the purpose of visiting Gabriel at his house.

Since he avoided her and made no sign, she would go to him.

Surely a sister might visit her brother ! Indeed, was it not her duty to warn him or console him ?

Unfortunately, all the courage which it had cost Diane to resolve upon that step was to be in vain.

Gabriel also selected the lonely hours of the early morning for his wanderings, which he had by no means abandoned; and when Diane knocked with trembling hand at the door of his house, he had already been gone more than half an hour.

Should she await his return? It was always uncertain, and a too long absence from the Louvre might expose Diane to slander.

But no matter; she determined to wait at least until the expiration of the time she had set aside for the visit.

She inquired for Aloyse, for she also desired to see her, and question her with her own lips.

André escorted his mistress into an unoccupied room, and went to inform the nurse.

Not for many years, not since the happy days of Montgommery and Vimoutiers, had Aloyse and Diane met, — the woman of the people and the daughter of the king.

Yet both their lives had been engrossed by the same thought, and anxiety upon the same subject still filled their days with dread, and robbed their nights of sleep.

So when Aloyse, coming hurriedly into the room, would have bowed low before Madame de Castro, Diane threw herself into the good woman's arms, and warmly embraced her, saying as she used to say in the old days, —

“Dear nurse!”

“What, Madame!” exclaimed Aloyse, moved to tears, “do you really remember me? Do you recognize me?”

“Do I remember you! do I recognize you!” returned Diane; “you might as well ask me if I remember Enguerrand's house, or if I would recognize the Château de Montgommery!”

Meanwhile Aloyse with clasped hands was looking at Diane more attentively.

"How beautiful you are!" she cried, sighing and smiling at once.

She smiled, for she had dearly loved the young girl who had developed into the beautiful lady before her. She sighed, for as she dwelt upon her lovely features she could better estimate Gabriel's wretchedness.

Diane understood this look, which was both melancholy and enraptured, and hastened to say, with a slight blush, —

"I have not come to talk of myself, nurse."

"Is it of him, then?" said Aloyse.

"Of whom else, pray? for to you I can lay bare my heart. How unfortunate that I did not find him! I came to console him and myself at the same time. How is he? Always dejected and despairing, is he not? Why has he not been once to the Louvre to see me? What does he say? What is he doing? Tell me, oh, pray tell me, nurse!"

"Alas! Madame," replied Aloyse, "you are quite right in thinking that he is dejected and despairing. Imagine —"

Diane interrupted her.

"Wait a moment, good Aloyse," said she; "before you begin I have a word to say. I could stay here till to-morrow listening to you, you know, without growing weary, or without noticing the flight of time. But I must return to the Louvre before my absence is noticed. So promise me one thing: when I have been here an hour, whether he has returned or not, tell me so, and send me away."

"But, Madame," said Aloyse, "I am quite capable of forgetting the hour myself, and I should not grow weary of talking to you any sooner than you would of listening to me, you see."

"What can we do, then?" asked Diane. "I dread the effect of our combined weakness."

"Let us intrust the difficult duty to some third person," said Aloyse.

"The very thing! André."

The page, who had remained in an adjoining room, undertook to rap at the door when an hour had passed.

"And now," said Diane, taking her seat by the nurse's side, "we can talk at our ease, and tranquilly, if not joyfully."

But this interview, though of the deepest interest to these two afflicted creatures, was nevertheless full of difficulty and bitterness.

In the first place, neither of them knew how far the other was cognizant of the terrible secrets of the Montgomery family.

Then, too, in what Aloyse did know of her young master's later life there were many troublesome matters which she was afraid to mention. In what way could she explain his long absences, his sudden returns, his preoccupation, and his silence?

At last, however, the good nurse did tell Diane all that she knew, — that is to say, all that she had seen; and Diane while listening to her doubtless experienced a delicious pleasure in hearing Gabriel spoken of, mingled though it was with deep grief at learning such sad news of him.

In truth, Aloyse's revelations were not of a nature calculated to calm Madame de Castro's apprehensions, but rather to rekindle them; for this earnest and impassioned witness of the young count's anguish and suffering brought vividly before Diane's mind all the torments by which his life was harassed.

Diane became more and more fully persuaded that if

she wished to save those whom she loved it was high time for her to intervene.

An hour is quickly gone, no matter how painful the subject of conversation. Diane and Aloyse were startled and amazed when André's rap was heard at the door.

"What! already?" they cried in one breath.

"Well, be it so!" said Diane. "I am going to stay just a quarter of an hour longer."

"Be careful, Madame!" said the nurse.

"You are right, nurse; I must and will go now. But one word: in all that you have told me of Gabriel you have omitted — I mean, does he never speak of me?"

"Never, Madame, I must agree."

"Oh, it is better so!" sighed Diane.

"And he would do better still never even to think of you any more."

"Do you believe, nurse, that he does think of me, then?" asked Madame de Castro, eagerly.

"I am only too sure of it, Madame," said Aloyse.

"Nevertheless, he carefully avoids me; he even shuns the Louvre."

"If he does avoid the Louvre, Madame," said Aloyse, shaking her head, "it is not because of her whom he loves."

"I understand," thought Diane, shuddering; "it is because of him whom he hates."

"Oh!" she said aloud, "I must see him, — absolutely I *must*."

"Do you wish me, Madame, to tell him from you to go to the Louvre to seek you?"

"No, no, — not to the Louvre!" exclaimed Diane, in alarm. "Don't let him come to the Louvre! I will see — I will be on the lookout for another opportunity like this morning. I will come here again myself."

"But suppose that he has gone out again?" observed Aloyse. "What day will you come, what week, — can you tell at all? He will wait for you; have no fear of that."

"Alas!" said Diane, "poor king's child that I am, how can I say that at such a day or such an hour I shall be free? However, if it is possible, I will send André on before to warn him."

At this moment the page rapped a second time, fearful that he had not been heard before.

"Madame," he cried, "the streets and squares about the Louvre are beginning to be thronged."

"I am coming," replied Madame de Castro; "I am coming."

"Well, we must part, my good nurse," she continued. "Embrace me as you used to do when I was a child, you know, in the old, old happy days."

While Aloyse, unable to utter a word, held Diane close to her breast, —

"Oh, watch over him! take good care of him!" she said in the nurse's ear.

"As I did when he was a child, in the old, old happy days," said Aloyse.

"Oh, better, even better, Aloyse! In that time he was not in such sore need."

Diane left the house without having met Gabriel, and half an hour later she was safely in her apartments at the Louvre. But if she had no reason to feel disturbed at the result of the hazardous step she had taken, her anguish and dread on the subject of Gabriel's unknown designs were even greater than before.

The forebodings of a woman's loving heart are apt to be only too accurate forecasts of the future.

Gabriel did not return home until the day was well

advanced. The heat was intense, and he was wearied in body and mind.

But when Aloyse uttered Diane's name and told of her visit, he stood erect with new life, his chest heaving and his heart throbbing.

"What did she want? What did she say? What did she do? Oh, why was I not here? Come, tell me everything, Aloyse, — every word, every movement."

He took his turn at questioning the nurse, hardly giving her time to reply.

"She wants to see me?" he cried. "She has something to say to me? And she does n't know when she may be able to come again? Oh, Aloyse, Aloyse, I cannot wait in such uncertainty! surely you can see that. I shall go to the Louvre at once."

"To the Louvre! Oh, Heaven preserve us!" ejaculated Aloyse, in terror.

"Yes, to be sure," replied Gabriel, calmly. "I am not banished from the Louvre, so far as I know; and the man who had the honor of restoring Madame de Castro to liberty at Calais surely has the right to pay his respects to her in Paris."

"Of course," said Aloyse, trembling like a leaf; "but Madame de Castro was very particular to say that you were not to come to the Louvre to see her."

"Have I anything to fear there?" said Gabriel, proudly. "That would be one reason more for me to go."

"No," replied the nurse; "it was probably on her own account that Madame de Castro feared your coming."

"Her reputation would suffer much more from a secret and surreptitious action, if discovered, than from a public visit in broad daylight, such as I propose to pay, — such as I will pay her to-day, at this moment."

He called for a servant to bring him a change of clothes.

"But, Monseigneur," said poor Aloyse, at the end of her arguments, "Madame de Castro herself has remarked that you have shunned the Louvre hitherto. You have not thought best to go there once since your return."

"I have not been to see Madame de Castro because she has not summoned me," said Gabriel. "I have avoided the Louvre because I had no reason to go there; but to-day a feeling that I cannot resist urges me to go (although my action may result in nothing), for Madame de Castro wishes to see me. I have sworn, Aloyse, to allow my own will to slumber, and to leave everything to God and my destiny, and I am going to the Louvre at once."

Thus Diane's step bade fair to produce the opposite effect from that contemplated by her.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE IMPRUDENCE OF PRECAUTION.

GABRIEL met with no opposition to his entrance to the Louvre. Since the taking of Calais the name of the young Comte de Montgomery had been heard too often for any one to think of refusing him leave to enter the suite of apartments occupied by Madame de Castro.

Diane, with one of her women, was engaged at the moment on some fancy-work. Very frequently she involuntarily let her hands fall in her lap, and would sit and dream about her interview with Aloyse that morning.

Suddenly André entered in great bewilderment.

"Madame, Monsieur le Vicomte d'Exmès!" he announced. (The boy had not ceased to call his old master by that name.)

"Who? Monsieur d'Exmès! here!" Diane repeated, overwhelmed.

"Yes, Madame, he is close behind me," said the page. "Here he is."

Gabriel appeared at the door, doing his best to control his emotion. He bowed low to Madame de Castro, who, in her confusion, did not at first return his salute.

However, she dismissed the page and her maid with a gesture, and they were left alone. Then they approached, and their hands met in a cordial grasp.

For some seconds they remained with hands joined, gazing at each other in silence.

"You thought best to come to my house, Diane," said Gabriel at last, in a deep voice. "You wished to see me, to speak with me ; so I have hastened to you."

"Did it need that action on my part, Gabriel, to surprise you that I wanted to see you ? Did you not know it well enough without that ?"

"Diane," Gabriel replied with his sad smile, "I have given sufficient proofs of courage heretofore, so I may venture to confess that in coming to the Louvre, I am afraid."

"Afraid of whom ?" asked Diane, who was herself afraid of the effect of her own question.

"Afraid of you ! — of myself !" replied Gabriel.

"And that is why you chose rather to forget our former affection ? — I speak of the legitimate and sanctified side of it," she hastened to add.

"I should have preferred to forget everything, I confess, Diane, rather than put foot inside the Louvre. But alas ! I could not. And the proof —"

"The proof ?"

"The proof is that I seek you always and everywhere ; that though dreading your presence I would have given anything in the world to see you a moment in the distance. The proof is, too, that while prowling about Fontainebleau, or Paris, or St. Germain, around the royal châteaux, instead of desiring what I was supposed to be on the lookout for, it has been you, your sweet and lovely face, a sight of your dress among the trees, or on some terrace, that I have longed for and invoked and coveted ! Last of all the proof lies in this fact : that you had only to take one step toward me to make me forget prudence, duty, terror, everything ! And here I am in the Louvre, which I ought to shun. I reply to all your questions. I feel that all this is hazardous and

insane, nevertheless I do it. Have I given you proof enough now, Diane?"

"Oh, yes, Gabriel, yes," said Diane, hastily, trembling with excitement and emotion.

"Ah, would to Heaven that I had been wiser," continued Gabriel, "and had adhered to my former resolution to see you no more, to flee from you if you summoned me, and to keep silence if you questioned me! That would have been much better for both of us, Diane, believe me. I knew what I was doing. I preferred to cause you anxiety rather than real grief. Oh, my God! why am I without power to withstand your voice and your look?"

Diane began to understand that she had really been wrong in her desire to be relieved from her mortal uncertainty. Every subject of conversation was painful for them, every question concealed a danger. Between these two beings whom God had created for happiness perhaps, there was no possibility of aught but doubt and peril and misery, thanks to the machinations of man.

But since Diane had thus challenged fate, she had no desire to avoid it; quite the contrary. She would go to the bottom of the abyss to which her anxiety had exposed her, though she were to find there nought but despair and death.

After a thoughtful silence, she began thus:—

"I was desirous to see you, Gabriel, for two reasons; I had an explanation to make to you in the first instance, as well as one to ask at your hands."

"Speak, Diane," replied Gabriel. "Lay bare my heart, and rend it at your will. It is yours."

"In the first place, Gabriel, I felt that I must let you know why, after I received your message, I did not at once assume the veil you sent back to me, and enter

some convent immediately, as I expressed my intention of doing in our last sad interview at Calais."

"Have I reproached you in the least as to that, Diane?" returned Gabriel. "I told André to say to you that I gave you back your promise, and those were no mere empty words on my part; I meant what I said."

"I also mean to become a nun, Gabriel, and be sure that I have simply postponed carrying out my resolve."

"But why, Diane, — why renounce the world in which you were made to shine?"

"Set your mind at rest upon that point, dear friend; it is not altogether to remain faithful to the oath I took, but to satisfy the secret longing of my soul as well, that I intend to leave this world where I have suffered so bitterly. I must have peace and rest, and I know not now where to find either except with God. Do not envy me this last refuge."

"Oh, but I do envy you!" said Gabriel.

"But you see," continued Diane, "I have had a good reason for not at once carrying out my unalterable purpose; I wished to be sure that you gratified the request I made in my last letter, — that you forbore to make yourself judge and executioner; that you did not attempt to anticipate God's will."

"If one only could anticipate it!" muttered Gabriel.

"In short, I hoped," Diane went on, "that I might be able, in case of need, to throw myself between the two men whom I love, but who abhor each other; and who can say that I might not thus prevent a disaster, or a crime? Surely you do not blame me for such a thought as that, Gabriel?"

"I cannot blame an angel for doing what the angelic nature prompts, Diane. You have been very generous, but it is easy to understand it of you."

"Ah!" cried Madame de Castro, "how can I know that I have been generous, or to what extent I am generous now? I am wandering in darkness and at hazard! Besides, it is upon that very point that I wish to question you, Gabriel; for I desire to know my destiny in all its horror."

"Diane, Diane, it is a fatal curiosity!" said Gabriel.

"No matter!" replied Diane, "I will not live in this fearful perplexity and anxiety another day. Tell me, Gabriel, have you become convinced that I am really your sister, or have you absolutely lost all hope of ever learning the truth as to that strange secret? Tell me, I ask, — nay, I implore you!"

"I will tell you," said Gabriel, mournfully. "Diane, there is an old Spanish proverb which says that we must always be prepared for the worst. I have, therefore, accustomed myself, since our parting, to look upon you in my thoughts as my sister. But the truth is that I have obtained no new proof; only, as you say, I have no more hope, no more means of acquiring proof."

"God in Heaven!" cried Diane. "The — he who might furnish these proofs, was he no longer alive when you returned from Calais?"

"He was, Diane."

"Ah, I see, then, that the sacred promise made to you was not redeemed? Who, then, told me that the king had received you with wonderful favor?"

"All that was promised, Diane, was strictly performed."

"Oh, Gabriel, with what an ominous expression you say that! What fearful puzzle still underlies all this, Holy Mother of God!"

"You have asked me, Diane, and you shall know the whole," said Gabriel. "You shall share equally with me in my awful secret. And, indeed, I shall be glad to

know what you think of what I am about to disclose to you, — whether, after you have heard it you will still persist in your clemency, and whether your tone and your features and your movements will not in any event belie the words of forgiveness which may come to your lips. — Listen.”

“I listen in fear and trembling, Gabriel.”

Thereupon, Gabriel, in a breathless, quivering voice, told Madame de Castro the whole sombre story: of the king’s reception of him; and how Henri had again reaffirmed his promise; the remonstrances which Madame de Poitiers and the constable had seemed to be making to him; of the night of feverish anguish that he had passed; of his second visit to the Châtelet, his descent into the bowels of the pestilence-laden prison, and the lugubrious narrative of Monsieur de Sazerac, — in short, everything.

Diane listened without interrupting him, without an exclamation or a movement, as mute and rigid as a statue, her eyes fixed in their sockets, and her very hair fairly standing on end.

There was a long pause when Gabriel had finished his gloomy story. Then Diane tried to speak, but could not, for her tongue refused to perform its office. Gabriel seemed to feel a dreadful species of pleasure as he observed her anguish and her terror. At last, she succeeded in ejaculating, —

“Mercy for the king!”

“Ah!” cried Gabriel, “do you ask for mercy for him? Then you, too, must judge him guilty! Mercy? Ah, your very appeal is a condemnation! Mercy? He deserves death, does he not?”

“Oh, I did not say that,” replied Diane, in dismay.

“Indeed you did say it, in effect! I see that you agree with me, Diane. You think and feel as I do. But we

come to different conclusions in accordance with the difference in our natures. The woman pleads for mercy, and the man demands justice ! ”

“ Ah ! ” cried Diane, “ rash, insane creature that I am ! Why did I tempt you to come to the Louvre ? ”

As she said these words some one rapped softly at the door.

“ Who is there ? What is wanted ? *Mon Dieu !* ” exclaimed Madame de Castro.

André partially opened the door.

“ Excuse me, Madame,” said he, “ a message from the king.”

“ From the king ! ” echoed Gabriel, whose face lighted up.

“ Why do you bring me this letter now, André ? ”

“ Madame, they told me it was urgent.”

“ Very well, give it me. What does the king want of me ? You may go, André. If there is any reply, I will call you.”

André left the room. Diane broke the seal of the king’s letter, and read in a low tone, and with increasing terror, what follows :—

MY DEAR DIANE, — I am told that you are at the Louvre ; do not go out, I beg you, until I have visited you in your apartments. I am at a sitting of the council which is likely to end at any moment. When I leave the council-chamber I will come immediately to you. Expect me very soon.

It is a long while since I have seen you alone ! I am in low spirits, and feel that I must have a few moments’ talk with my beloved daughter. Farewell for the moment.

HENRI.

Diane, with colorless cheeks, crumpled the letter in her hands when she had read it.

What should she do ?

Dismiss Gabriel at once ? But suppose on his way out he should meet the king, who might arrive at any moment !

Should she keep the youth with her ? The king would find him there when he came in.

To warn the king would excite his suspicion, while on the other hand to warn Gabriel would simply arouse his anger by seeming to dread it.

A meeting between these two men, each of whom was so threatening to the other, now appeared inevitable, and it was she herself, Diane, who would gladly shed her own blood to save them, who had brought about the fatal encounter !

"What does the king write to you, Diane ?" asked Gabriel, with an assumed tranquillity which was belied by the trembling of his voice.

"Nothing, nothing, really," replied Diane. "A reminder of the reception this evening."

"Perhaps I discommoded you, Diane," Gabriel remarked. "If so, I will go."

"No, no, don't go !" cried Diane, hastily. "But then," she continued, "if you have any business which demands your immediate attention elsewhere, I should not like to detain you."

"That letter has troubled you, Diane. I fear that I have wearied you, and will take my leave."

"You weary me, my friend ! Can you believe it ?" said Madame de Castro. "Was it not I who went in search of you, in some measure ? Alas ! I fear, very imprudently. I will see you again, but not here — at your own house. The first opportunity that presents itself for me to get away, I will come to see you, and resume this sweet though painful interview. I promise you. Rely upon me. At the moment, you are right, I confess ; I am

somewhat preoccupied and in pain. I feel as if I were in a burning fever — ”

“ I see, Diane, and I will leave you,” replied Gabriel, sadly.

“ We shall meet again soon, my friend,” said she. “ Now go, go ! ”

She accompanied him as far as the door.

“ If I keep him here,” she thought, “ it is certain that he will see the king ; if he goes away at once, there is at least a chance that they may not meet.”

Yet she hesitated still, and was anxious and tremulous.

“ Pardon me, Gabriel,” said she, quite beside herself, as they stood on the threshold ; “ just a word more. *Mon Dieu !* Your narrative has upset me so that it is hard for me to collect my thoughts. What was I about to ask you ? Ah, I know ! Just one word, but one of much importance. You have not yet told me what you intend to do. I begged for mercy, and you cried, ‘ Justice ! ’ Pray tell me how you hope to obtain justice ! ”

“ I do not know yet,” said Gabriel, gloomily ; “ I trust in God for the event and the opportunity.”

“ For the opportunity ! ” repeated Diane, with a shudder. “ For the opportunity, — what do you mean by that ? Oh, come back, come back ! I cannot let you go, Gabriel, until you have explained to me that word ‘ opportunity ; ’ stay, I implore you ! ”

Taking his hand, she led him back into the room.

“ If he meets the king elsewhere,” thought poor Diane, “ they will be quite alone, — the king without attendants, and Gabriel with his sword at his side ; whereas if I am present, I can at least throw myself between them, and implore Gabriel to withhold his hand, or intercept his blow. Yes, he must remain.

“ I feel better now,” said she, aloud. “ Remain, Gabriel,

and let us renew our conversation, and do you give me the explanation I ask. I am much better."

"No, Diane; you are even more excited than you were," replied Gabriel. "Do you know what has come into my mind as an explanation of your alarm?"

"No, indeed, Gabriel. How should I know?"

"Well," said Gabriel, "just as your cry for mercy was an avowal that the crime was patent in your eyes, so your present apprehensions show that you believe the chastisement would be legitimate. You dread my vengeance for the culprit; and since you appreciate the justice of it, you are keeping me here to warn him of possible reprisals on my part, which, though they might terrify and afflict you, would not astonish you, — which would, on the other hand, seem quite natural to you. Am I not right?"

Diane was startled, so truly had the blow struck home.

Nevertheless, collecting all her force, she said, —

"Oh, Gabriel, how can you believe that I could conceive such thoughts of you? You, my own Gabriel, a murderer! you deal a blow from behind at one who could not defend himself! Impossible! It would be worse than a crime; it would be dastardly. Do you imagine that I am trying to keep you? Oh, no, far from it; go whenever you please, and I will open the door for you. I am perfectly calm; *mon Dieu*, yes! — perfectly calm upon this point at least. If anything worries me, it is no such idea as that, I assure you. Leave me, leave the Louvre, with your mind at rest. I will come again to your house to finish our conversation. Go, my friend, go! You see how anxious I am to keep you!"

As she spoke she had led him into the anteroom, where the page was in attendance. Diane thought of ordering him to stay with Gabriel until he had left the Louvre; but that precaution would have betrayed her suspicion.

However, she could not resist the impulse to call André to her side by a sign, and whisper in his ear, —

“Do you know if the council is at an end?”

“Not yet, Madame,” replied André, beneath his breath. “I have not yet seen the councillors leave the hall.”

“Adieu, Gabriel,” resumed Diane, aloud, with much animation. “Adieu, my friend. You almost force me to send you away, to prove that I have no such object as you allege in keeping you here. Adieu! — but for only a short time.”

“For only a short time,” said the youth, with a melancholy smile, as he pressed her hand.

He left her; but she stood looking after him until the last door had closed behind him.

Then returning to her room, she fell upon her knees before her *prie-Dieu*, weeping bitterly, and with palpitating heart.

“O *mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*” she prayed, “in Jesus’ name, watch over him who is perhaps my brother, as well as over him who is perhaps my father! Preserve the two beings whom I love, O my God! Thou alone canst do it now.”

CHAPTER XXX.

OPPORTUNITY.

IN spite of her earnest efforts to prevent it, or rather because of those very efforts, events occurred as Madame de Castro had foreseen and dreaded.

Gabriel had gone from her presence sorrowful and agitated. Diane's fever had communicated itself to him in some measure, and clouded his eyes and confused his thoughts.

He passed mechanically down the stairways and along the familiar corridors of the Louvre, without paying much attention to exterior objects.

Nevertheless, as he was on the point of opening the door of the great gallery, he did remember that on his return from St. Quentin it was there that he had met Mary Stuart, and through the intervention of the young queen-dauphine had succeeded in reaching the king's presence, where the first fraud and humiliation had been practised upon him.

For he had not been deceived and outraged on one occasion only; several times had his enemies trampled upon his hope before its life was finally extinct. After he had first been made their dupe, he would have done well to expect similar treatment, and to have anticipated such exaggerated and cowardly interpretations of the letter of a sacred agreement.

While these irritating reminiscences were coursing through his brain, he opened the door and entered the gallery.

At the other end of the gallery, the corresponding door opened at the same moment.

A man entered.

It was Henri II., — Henri, the author of, or at least the principal accessory in, the foul and dastardly deception which had forever withered Gabriel's heart and poisoned his life.

The king came forward alone, unarmed and unattended.

The offender and the offended, for the first time since the perpetration of the outrage, found themselves face to face, alone, and scarcely one hundred feet apart, — a distance which could be traversed in twenty seconds with twenty steps.

We have said that Gabriel had stopped short, motionless and rigid as a statue, — like a statue of Vengeance or of Hatred.

The king halted, as he suddenly espied the man whom for nearly a year he had seen only in his dreams.

The two stood thus for a moment without moving, as if mutually fascinated by each other.

In the whirl of sensations and thoughts which filled Gabriel's brain, the poor fellow in his distraction could fix upon no course to adopt, and form no resolution. He waited.

As for Henri, despite his proved courage, the sensation that he experienced was beyond question fear; but at the humiliating thought he held his head erect, banished his first cowardly impulse, and made up his mind what to do.

To call for help would have been to show fear; to retire as he had come would have been to flee.

He pursued his way toward the door, where Gabriel remained as if nailed to the spot.

Moreover, a superior force, a sort of irresistible and fatal fascination, urged him on toward the pale phantom who seemed to be waiting for him.

The perplexities of his destiny began to unfold themselves around him.

Gabriel experienced a species of blind, instinctive satisfaction as he saw him approach ; but still he could not succeed in evolving any distinct thought from the clouds that obscured his intellect. He simply laid his hand upon the hilt of his sword.

When the king was within a few steps of Gabriel, the personal dread which he had previously thrust away seized him anew, and held his heart fast, as it were in a vice.

He said to himself in a vague way that his last hour had come, and that it was just.

However, his step did not falter. His feet seemed to carry him along of their own accord, and independently of his own dazed will. It is thus that somnambulists go about.

When he was directly in front of Gabriel, so that he could hear his quick breathing, and might touch him with his hand, he mechanically raised his hand to his velvet cap, and saluted the young count.

Gabriel did not acknowledge the salute. He maintained his marble-like attitude ; and his hand, like that of a graven image, never left his sword.

In the king's eyes Gabriel was no longer a subject, but a messenger of God, before whom he must bow ; while to Gabriel Henri was no longer a king, but a man, who had slain his father, and to whom he owed nothing but bitter hatred.

However, he allowed him to pass without doing aught, and without a word.

The king, on his part, did not move aside nor turn around nor express any feeling at such lack of respect.

When the door had closed between the two men, and the charm was broken, each of them awoke, as it were, rubbed his eyes, and asked himself, —

“Was it not a dream?”

Gabriel slowly left the Louvre. He did not regret the lost opportunity, nor did he repent that he had allowed it to escape him.

He felt a sort of confused joy.

“My prey is coming to me,” he thought; “already he is fluttering around my nets, and getting within reach of my spear.”

He slept that night more soundly than he had done for a long while.

The king, however, was not so tranquil. He went on to Diane’s apartments, where she was expecting him, and welcomed him with such transports of delight as we can imagine.

But Henri was absorbed and restless. He did not venture to speak of the Comte de Montgomery, although he fancied that Gabriel was doubtless coming from his daughter’s apartments when they met. However, he did not choose to touch that chord; therefore, while he had set out to pay Diane this visit in a spirit of effusive affection and confidence, he maintained from beginning to end an air of suspicion and constraint.

He then returned to his own apartments, sad and gloomy. He felt displeased with himself and others, and his sleep that night was very troubled and broken.

It seemed to him that he was becoming involved in a labyrinth from which he should never come out alive.

"However," he said to himself, "I offered myself to that man's sword to-day in a measure; so it is evident that he does not wish to kill me."

The king, in order to distract his thoughts and seek forgetfulness for his troubles, determined to leave Paris for a time. During the days immediately following his encounter with the Comte de Montgomery, he went successively to St. Germain, Chambord, and Madame de Poitiers's Château d'Anet.

Toward the close of the month of June he was at Fontainebleau.

He was constantly moving about, and had the appearance of a man wishing to drown his trouble in motion and noise and excitement.

The approaching fêtes in connection with his daughter Élisabeth's marriage with Philip II. afforded an excuse as well as opportunity for this feverish need of continual action.

At Fontainebleau he desired to entertain the Spanish ambassador with the spectacle of a great hunt in the forest, and it was appointed to take place on the 23d of June.

The day broke hot and threatening, and the weather became very tempestuous.

Nevertheless Henri did not countermand the orders he had given, for the excitement would surely be no less in a storm.

He selected the fleetest and highest-mettled horse in his stables, and followed the hunt with a sort of fury; and it happened at one time that carried away by his own ardor and the temper of his horse, he outstripped all his companions, lost sight of the hunt completely, and missed his way in the forest.

Clouds were piling up in the sky, and ominous rum-

blings were heard in the distance. The storm was about to break.

Henri, leaning forward upon his foaming steed, whose headlong pace he made no attempt to slacken, but on the contrary, urging him on with voice and spur, rode on and on, more swiftly than the wind, among the trees and rocks; the dizzy gallop seemed to suit his humor, for he laughed loud and long.

For a few moments he had forgotten his troubles.

Suddenly his horse reared in terror; a dazzling flash lighted up the sky, and the sudden apparition of one of those huge white rocks which abound in the forest of Fontainebleau, towering aloft at a corner of the path, had startled him.

A loud peal of thunder increased twofold the fear of the skittish animal. He bounded forward, and the sudden movement broke the rein close to the bit, so that Henri entirely lost control.

Then began a furious, fearful mad race.

The horse, with mane erect, foaming flanks, and rigid legs, shot through the air like an arrow.

The king, clinging to the animal's neck to save himself from falling, his hair on end, and his clothes blowing about in the wind, vainly tried to seize the rein, which would have been of no use in his hands.

Any one seeing the horse and his rider pass thus in the tempest would have infallibly taken them for a vision from the infernal regions, and would have thought only of exorcising the evil spirit with the sign of the cross.

But no one was at hand; not a living soul, not an inhabited dwelling. That last chance of safety which the presence of a fellow-man affords to one in peril was lacking to this anointed horseman.

Not a woodcutter, not a beggar, not a poacher, not even a thief, to save this crowned king!

The pouring rain, and the more and more frequent peals of thunder, ever nearer at hand, drove the maddened steed to an even more headlong and terrific pace.

Henri, with staring eyes, tried in vain to recognize the path along which the fatal race was being run. At last he did succeed in fixing his position at a certain cleared space among the trees, and then he fairly shook with terror, for the path led straight to the summit of a steep rock, whose perpendicular wall overhung a deep chasm, a veritable abyss!

The king did his utmost to stop the horse with his hand and voice, but to no purpose.

To throw himself from the saddle was to break his neck against some tree-trunk or granite boulder, and it was better not to resort to that desperate measure until the last moment.

In any event Henri felt that he was lost, and full of remorse and dread, was already commending his soul to God.

He did not know at just what part of the path he was, or whether the precipice was close at hand or at some distance; but he must be ready, and he was just about to let himself to the ground, at all hazards.

At this moment, as he cast a last look about him in all directions, he saw a man at the end of the path, mounted like himself, but standing beneath the shelter of an oak.

At that distance he could not recognize the man, whose features and form, in addition, were hidden by a long cloak and a broad-rimmed hat. But it was doubtless some gentleman who had lost his way in the forest, as he himself had done.

At last Henri felt that his safety was assured. The path was narrow, and the stranger had only to move his horse forward a step or two to block the king's passage; or by

simply reaching out his hand he might stop him in his headlong course.

Nothing could be easier ; and even though there were some risk attending it, the unknown, on recognizing the king, ought not to think twice about incurring the risk to save his master.

In less than one twentieth of the time it has taken to read these words, the three or four hundred paces which separated Henri from his rescuer had been traversed.

Henri, to attract attention, uttered a cry of distress and waved his hand. The stranger saw him, and made a movement ; he was doubtless making ready.

But oh, in terror's name ! although the maddened horse passed directly before the unknown horseman, he failed to make the slightest attempt to stop him.

Indeed, it seemed as if he fell back somewhat, to avoid any possible contact.

The king uttered a second cry, no longer appealing and imploring, but of rage and despair.

However, he thought that the iron feet of his horse seemed to be now striking on stone, and not on the sod. He had arrived at the fatal precipice.

He whispered the name of God, released his foot from the stirrup, and let himself fall to the ground, at every risk.

The rebound carried him some fifteen paces away ; but miraculously, as it appeared, he fell upon a little mound of moss and grass, and sustained no injury. It was full time ! Less than twenty feet away was the sheer precipice.

The poor horse, amazed at being thus relieved of his burden, gradually lessened his pace, so that when he reached the edge of the chasm, he had time to measure its width, and instinctively threw himself upon his haunches, with flaming eyes and disordered mane, and foam flying from his distended nostrils.

But if the king had been still upon his back, the shock of his sudden stop would surely have thrown him into the abyss.

Having offered a fervent prayer of thanksgiving to God, who had so evidently protected him, and having soothed and remounted his horse, his first thought was to hasten back and vent his anger upon the wretch who would so basely have left him to die, except for the intervention of God.

The stranger had remained in the same spot, still motionless beneath the folds of his black cloak.

"Wretch!" cried the king, when he had approached within ear-shot. "Did you not see the danger I was in? Did you not recognize me, regicide? And even though it were not your king, ought you not to rescue any man in such peril of his life, when you have only to stretch out your arm to do it, miscreant?"

The stranger did not move, nor did he reply; he simply raised his head slightly, which was shaded from Henri's eyes by his broad felt hat.

The king recoiled as he recognized the pale and dejected features of Gabriel. He said no more, but muttered to himself, lowering his head, —

"The Comte de Montgomery! Then I have nothing more to say."

And without another word, he put spurs to his horse and galloped off into the forest.

"He would not kill me," he said to himself, seized with a death-like tremor; "but it seems that he would let me die."

Gabriel, once more alone, repeated with a gloomy smile, —

"I feel that my prey is coming nearer, and the hour is approaching."

CHAPTER XXXI.

BETWEEN TWO DUTIES.

THE marriage contracts of Élisabeth and Marguerite de France were to be signed at the Louvre on the 28th of June, and the king returned to Paris on the 25th, more cast down and preoccupied than ever.

Especially since Gabriel's last appearance, his life had become a torment to him. He avoided being left alone, and constantly sought means of banishing temporarily the sombre thought by which he was possessed, so to speak.

But he had not mentioned that second encounter to a single soul; he was at once anxious and afraid to unbosom himself on the subject to some devoted and faithful heart; for he himself no longer knew what to think or what course to adopt, and the fearful thought which haunted him had thrown his mind into utter confusion.

Finally he determined to open his heart to Diane de Castro.

Diane had surely seen Gabriel again, he said to himself; there was no question that the young count had just left her when he encountered him the first time, so that Diane might possibly know his plans. In that case, she could and she ought either to set her father's mind at rest or to warn him; and Henri, despite the bitter doubts with which he was ceaselessly assailed, did not believe his beloved daughter capable of treachery toward him, or of conniving at it.

A mysterious instinct seemed to whisper to him that Diane was no less anxious than he. In fact, Diane de Castro, although she knew nothing of the two strange meetings which had taken place between the king and Gabriel, was equally ignorant as to what had become of the latter during the last few days. André, whom she had despatched several times to the house in the Rue des Jardins St. Paul to learn something of Gabriel's movements, had brought her no information. He had disappeared from Paris again. We have seen him haunting the king at Fontainebleau.

In the afternoon of June 26 Diane was sitting pensively in her apartments, quite alone, when one of her women came hurriedly in to announce the king.

Henri's face wore its ordinary grave expression. After the first greetings, he plunged at once into the matter in hand, as if to throw off his troublesome anxiety at the first opportunity.

"Dear Diane," said he, gazing intently into his daughter's eyes, "it is a long time since we have spoken together of Monsieur d'Exmès, who has now taken the title of Comte de Montgommery. It is a long time also since you have seen him, is it not? Tell me."

Diane at Gabriel's name turned pale and shuddered.

"Sire," she replied, "I have seen Monsieur d'Exmès once only since my return from Calais."

"Where did you see him, Diane?" asked the king.

"At the Louvre, Sire, in this very room."

"About a fortnight ago, was it not?"

"I should think it was about that time, Sire," replied Madame de Castro.

"I suspected as much," returned the king.

He paused a moment, as if to rearrange his ideas.

Diane observed him attentively and fearfully, trying to divine the purpose of his unexpected question.

But Henri's serious expression seemed impenetrable.

"Excuse me, Sire," she said, mustering all her courage. "May I venture to ask your Majesty why, after your long silence as to him who saved me from disgrace at Calais, you have done me the honor to pay me this visit to-day, and at this hour, expressly, I should judge, to interrogate me about him?"

"Do you wish to know, Diane?" asked the king.

"Sire, I am so bold," she replied.

"Very well, then, you shall know all," said Henri; "and I pray that my confidence may invite and induce yours. You have often told me that you loved me, my child."

"I have said it, and I say it again, Sire," cried Diane; "I love you as my sovereign, my benefactor, and my father."

"Therefore I may reveal everything to my loyal and loving daughter," said the king; "so listen, Diane."

"I listen with all my soul, Sire."

Henri then described his two encounters with Gabriel, — the first in the gallery of the Louvre, and the other in the forest of Fontainebleau. He told Diane of the strange demeanor, as of mute rebellion, which the young man had adopted, and how on the first occasion he had declined to raise his hand to salute his king, and the second time had declined to raise his hand to save his life.

Diane at this recital could not conceal her grief and her alarm. The conflict which she so dreaded between Gabriel and the king had already manifested itself on two occasions, and might soon appear again in a still more dangerous and terrible form.

Henri, affecting not to notice his daughter's emotion, ended with these words:—

"These are serious offences, are they not, Diane? They almost amount to *lèse-majesté*! And yet I have concealed these insults from everybody, and dissembled my indignation, because this young man has really suffered at my hands in the past, notwithstanding the glorious service he has rendered my kingdom, which ought doubtless to have been rewarded much more generously." Fixing a piercing glance upon Diane, the king continued, —

"I do not know, Diane, nor do I wish to know, whether you have been made acquainted with the wrong I have done Monsieur d'Exmès; I only wish you to feel that my silence has been due to my appreciation of that wrong and my regret for it. But is it not imprudent for me to maintain silence? Do not these outrages give warning of others more flagrant still? Ought I not to have an eye to Monsieur d'Exmès? Upon these points I have come, Diane, to ask for your friendly advice."

"I am grateful for your confidence in me, Sire," replied Diane, sorrowfully, being thus forced to choose between the duty which she owed respectively to the two men who were dearest to her on earth.

"It is a very natural confidence, Diane," the king returned. "Well?" he added, observing that his daughter seemed to be at a loss.

"Well, Sire," replied Diane, with an effort, "I think that your Majesty is right, and that for you to take some notice of Monsieur d'Exmès's movements will perhaps be the wisest course you can adopt."

"Do you think, then, Diane, that my life is in danger from him?" asked Henri.

"Oh, I did not say that, Sire!" cried Diane, warmly. "But Monsieur d'Exmès seems to have been wounded to the quick, and there may be danger perhaps —"

Poor Diane stopped abruptly, quivering with the torture she was undergoing, the perspiration standing on her forehead in great beads. This species of denunciation, which her moral sense had almost torn from her, was very repugnant to her noble heart.

But Henri put a wholly different construction upon her very evident distress.

"I understand you, Diane," said he, rising and pacing heavily to and fro. "Yes, I foresaw it clearly. You see I must be suspicious of this young man; but to live with this Damocles's sword forever hanging over my head is impossible. The obligations of kings are not the same as those by which other gentlemen are governed. I propose to take effective measures to protect myself against Monsieur d'Exmès."

He walked toward the door as if to leave the room, but Diane threw herself in his path.

What, Gabriel to be accused and perhaps imprisoned! And it was she, Diane, who had betrayed him! She could not abide the thought. After all, Gabriel's words had not been so full of menace.

"Sire, one moment, pray!" she cried. "You are mistaken; I swear that you are mistaken! I have not said a word to imply that your doubly sacred head is in danger. Nothing in Monsieur d'Exmès's confidences could ever make me suspect him capable of crime. Otherwise, great God! would I not have told you everything?"

"Very true," said Henri, stopping once more; "but what did you mean to say, then, Diane?"

"I meant to say simply that I thought it would be well for your Majesty to avoid as far as possible these vexatious encounters where an offended subject is enabled to show his forgetfulness of the respect due to his king. But a regicide's failure to show respect is a very

different matter. Sire, would it be worthy of you to try to remedy one unjust act by another equally iniquitous?"

"No, surely not; I had no such intention," said the king; "and I have proved it by keeping these occurrences to myself. Since you have dissipated my suspicions, Diane; since you will answer for my bodily safety to your own conscience and before God; and since in your opinion I may be perfectly tranquil—"

"Tranquil!" Diane interrupted with a shudder. "Ah, I didn't go so far as that, Sire. With what a terrible load of responsibility you overwhelm me! On the contrary, your Majesty ought to be careful and on your guard—"

"No," said the king, "I cannot live in a condition of never-ending dread and apprehension. For two weeks I have entirely ceased to enjoy life. This state of affairs must come to an end. One of two things must happen: either trusting in your word, Diane, I shall go tranquilly on with my life, thinking of the welfare of my realm, and not of my enemy,—in short, without troubling myself further about Vicomte d'Exmès; or I shall see that this man who bears me ill-will is put where he can no longer injure me, by giving information of his outrages; and since I occupy too proud and lofty a position to defend myself, I shall leave that task to those whose duty it is to safeguard my person."

"And who are they, Sire?" asked Diane.

"Why, Monsieur de Montmorency, first of all, as constable and commander-in-chief of the army."

"Monsieur de Montmorency!" echoed Diane, with an accent of horror.

That detested name at once recalled to her mind all the misfortunes of Gabriel's father, his long and harsh captivity, and his death. If Gabriel in turn should fall

into the constable's hands, a like fate was in store for him, and his destruction was certain.

In her imagination Diane saw him whom she had loved so dearly immured in a dungeon without light or air, and dying there in one night, or, more fearful still, lingering on for twenty years, and dying at the last cursing God and man, but more than all Diane the traitress, who with her equivocal and hesitating words had basely betrayed him.

There was no proof that Gabriel wished to slay the king, or would be able to do it, while there was no room for doubt that the bitter enmity of Monsieur de Montmorency would have no mercy on Gabriel.

Diane went over all this in her mind in a few seconds, and when the king finally propounded the direct question to her, —

“Well, Diane, what advice do you give me? Since you are better able than I to form an opinion as to the perils which beset my path, your word shall be my law. Ought I to think no more about Monsieur d’Exmès, or ought I, on the other hand, to busy myself with him exclusively?”

She replied in an agony of terror at his last words, “I have no other counsel to offer your Majesty than that of your own conscience. If any other than a man whom you had offended, Sire, had failed to show proper respect to you, or had basely abandoned you when in danger of your life, you would not, I fancy, have come to ask my advice as to the fit punishment to be meted out to the culprit. Therefore some very weighty motive must have constrained your Majesty to adopt a policy of silence which seems to imply forgiveness. Now I confess that I can see no reason why you should not continue to act as you have begun; for it seems to me

that if Monsieur d'Exmès had been capable of meditating a crime against you, he could hardly have expected two fairer opportunities than those which were offered him in a lonely gallery in the Louvre, and in the forest of Fontainebleau on the edge of a precipice — ”

“ You need say no more, Diane,” said Henri ; “ and I will not ask you another question. You have banished a serious anxiety from my heart, and I thank you sincerely for it, my dear child. Let us say no more about this. Now I shall be able to devote my thoughts freely to our approaching marriage festivities. I desire that they shall be magnificent, and that you shall be as magnificent as they. Diane, do you hear ? ”

“ I beg your Majesty to excuse me,” said Diane ; “ but I was just about to ask leave to absent myself from these festivities. I should much prefer, if I must confess it, to remain here by myself.”

“ What ! ” exclaimed the king ; “ but do you know, Diane, that this will be truly a royal display ? There will be games and tournaments, all on the most splendid scale, and I myself shall be one of those who hold the lists against all comers. What pressing affairs can you have to keep you away from such superb spectacles, my darling daughter ? ”

“ Sire,” replied Diane, in a tone of the utmost gravity, “ I have to pray.”

A few minutes later the king quitted Madame de Castro, with his heart relieved of part of its anguish.

But alas ! he left poor Diane with so much the more anguish at her heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

OMENS.

THE king, thenceforth almost free from the anxiety which had weighed upon him, urged on most energetically the preparations for the magnificent fêtes which he proposed to provide for his fair city of Paris, on the occasion of the happy marriages of his daughter Élisabeth with Philip II., and his sister Marguerite with the Duke of Savoy.

Very happy marriages, in sooth, and which surely deserved to be celebrated with such rejoicing and splendor. The author of *Don Carlos* has told us so well that we need not repeat it, what was the result of the first. We shall see to what the preliminaries of the other led.

The contract of marriage between Philibert Emmanuel and Marguerite de France was to be signed on the 28th of June.

Henri caused the announcement to be made that on that and the two following days there would be lists open at the Tournelles for tilting and other knightly sports.

And upon the pretext of paying a higher compliment to the bride and groom, but really to gratify his own intense passion for sport of that nature, the king declared that he would himself be among the challengers.

But on the morning of the 28th the queen, Catherine de Médicis, who at that time scarcely ever showed herself in public, sent an urgent request to the king for an interview with him.

Henri, we need not say, acquiesced at once in his wife's desire.

Catherine thereupon entered his apartment in much emotion.

"Ah, dear Sire," she exclaimed as soon as she saw him, "in Jesus' name, I implore you not to leave the Louvre until the end of this month of June."

"Why so, Madame, pray?" asked Henri, amazed at this unexpected request.

"Sire, because you are threatened by great peril during these last few days."

"Who has told you that?" demanded the king.

"Your star, Sire, which appeared last night in an observation made by myself and my Italian astrologer, with most threatening indications of danger, — of mortal danger!"

We must know that Catherine de Médicis about this time began to devote herself to those magical and astrological practices which very rarely deceived her in the whole course of her life, if we may trust the memoirs of the time.

But Henri was a confirmed scoffer in this matter of reading the stars, and he smilingly replied to the queen, —

"Well, Madame, if my star portends danger, it may come to me here as well as elsewhere."

"No, Sire," Catherine replied; "it is beneath the vault of heaven and in the open air that peril awaits you."

"Really! — a tempest perhaps?" said Henri.

"Sire, do not joke about such things!" retorted the queen. "The stars are the written word of God."

"Well, then, we must agree," said Henri, "that the divine handwriting is generally very obscure and confused."

"How so, Sire?"

"The erasures seem to me to make the text unintelligible, so that each one may decipher it almost to suit himself. You have read, Madame, in the celestial conjuring book, as you say, that my life is threatened if I quit the Louvre?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Very well. Now, Forcatel only last month saw something very different there. You think highly of Forcatel, Madame, I believe?"

"Yes," said the queen; "he is a learned man, who has already learned to read in the book where we are just beginning to spell."

"Know, then, Madame," rejoined the king, "that Forcatel read for me in these stars of yours this beautiful verse, which has no other fault except that it is utterly unintelligible: —

"‘If this is not Mars, dread his image.’"

"In what does that prediction weaken the one I have told you of?" asked Catherine.

"Just wait, Madame!" said Henri; "I have somewhere the nativity which was cast for me last year. Do you remember what destiny it foretold for me?"

"Very indistinctly, Sire."

"According to that horoscope, Madame, it is written in the stars that I shall die in a duel! Surely, that would be a rare and novel experience for a king. But a duel, in my humble opinion, is not the image of Mars, but the god himself."

"What is your conclusion from that, Sire?"

"Why, this, Madame: that since all these prophecies are contradictory and inconsistent, the surest way is to have no faith in any of them. The deceitful things give one another the lie, you can see yourself."

"So your Majesty will persist in leaving the Louvre during the next few days?"

"Under any other circumstances I should be most happy, Madame, to gratify you by remaining with you; but I have promised and publicly announced that I would be present at these festivities; so I must attend them."

"At all events, Sire, you will not enter the lists, will you?"

"There, again, my pledged word requires me, to my great regret, to refuse you, Madame. But what possible danger can there be for me in these sports? I am grateful to you from the bottom of my heart for your solicitude; yet let me assure you that your fears are altogether imaginary, and that to yield to them would be to imply a false belief that danger could possibly attend this courtly, good-natured jousting, which I by no means propose to have done away with on my account."

"Sire," rejoined Catherine, "I am accustomed to give way to your will, and to-day again I resign myself, but with grief and alarm at my heart."

"You will come to the Tournelles, Madame, will you not?" said the king, kissing Catherine's hand, — "were it for no other object than to applaud my prowess with the lance and convince yourself of the absurdity of your fears."

"I will obey you to the end," replied the queen, as she withdrew.

Along with all the court, except Diane de Castro, Catherine was present at the first day's tilting, where throughout the day the king crossed lances with all comers.

"Well, Madame, the stars seem to have been mistaken," he said jokingly to the queen in the evening.

Catherine sadly shook her head.

"Alas!" said she, "the month of June is not yet at an end."

The second day, the 29th, likewise passed off equally uneventfully. Henri did not leave the lists; and his good fortune was in proportion to his daring.

"You see, Madame, that the stars proved deceptive as to this day also," he again observed to Catherine, when they returned to the Louvre.

"Ah, Sire, now I only dread the third day!" cried the queen.

The last day of the tournament, June 30, was Friday, and was intended to be the most brilliant and splendid of the three, and to bring the festivities to a fitting close.

The four challengers were —

The king, who wore a white and black favor, — the colors of Madame de Poitiers;

The Duc de Guise, who wore white and pink;

Alphonse d'Este, Duc de Ferrare, who wore yellow and red; and

Jacques de Savoie, Duc de Nemours, whose colors were black and yellow.

Says Brantôme: —

"These four princes were the most skilful knights who could be found at that time, not in France alone, but in all countries. Thus on that day they performed prodigies of valor; and it was impossible to know to whom the palm should be awarded, although the king was one of the best and most expert horsemen in his realm."

Fortune seemed to divide her favors with impartial hand among these four dexterous and renowned challengers; and as course succeeded course, and the day drew to its close, it was hard to say to which of them the honor of the tournament belonged.

Henri was throughout in an almost feverish state of excitement. He was in his element in all such sports and passages-at-arms ; and he was quite as eager to be victorious on such occasions as on a real battle-field.

However, the evening came on apace, and the trumpets and clarions sounded the signal for the last course.

It was Monsieur le Duc de Guise's turn to hold the lists, and he did it in such knightly fashion as to win hearty applause from the ladies and the assembled multitude.

Then the queen, who began to breathe freely once more, rose from her seat.

It was the signal for departure.

"What ! is everything over ?" cried the excited and jealous king. "Wait, Mesdames, wait a moment ! Is it not my turn to run a course ?"

Monsieur de Vieilleville reminded the king that he had opened the lists ; that the four challengers had all run the same number of courses ; that they had all met with equal success, to be sure, and no one could be declared victor, but that the lists were closed and the day at an end.

"What !" retorted Henri, impatiently ; "if the king is the first to enter the lists, he should be the last to leave them. I do not choose that the day should end in this way. See, there are still two unbroken lances."

"But there are no more assailants, Sire," replied Monsieur de Vieilleville.

"I beg your pardon," said the king ; "do you not see that man who has kept his visor down all the time, and has not yet run ? Who is it, Vieilleville ?"

"Sire, I don't know, — I had not noticed him."

"Monsieur," said Henri, approaching the unknown, "you will, if you please, break this last lance with me."

The individual addressed did not reply for a moment, but at last in a deep and solemn voice, which he struggled to control, he said, —

“I beg your Majesty to allow me to decline this honor.”

The tone of his voice caused Henri, without knowing why, to feel a strange uneasiness mingled with his feverish excitement.

“Allow you to decline ! no, I cannot allow that, Monsieur,” said he, with a gesture of nervous anger.

Then the stranger silently raised his visor.

For the third time within a fortnight, the king saw the pale and dejected countenance of Gabriel de Montgomery.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE FATAL JOUST.

AT sight of the solemn and ominous features of the young count, the king felt an involuntary tremor of surprise, perhaps of terror, which set every nerve quivering.

But he would not confess to himself, still less let others observe that first shudder, which he at once repressed. His heart reacted against his instinct ; and just because he had been afraid for one second, he afterward exhibited a degree of courage which amounted to recklessness.

Gabriel said again in his slow, grave tones, —

“I implore your Majesty not to persist in your desire !”

“Nevertheless I do persist in it, Monsieur de Montgommery,” the king replied.

His perception being obscured by so many contending emotions, Henri imagined that he could detect a sort of challenge in Gabriel’s words, and the tone in which they were uttered. Alarmed by the sudden return of that anxious feeling which Diane de Castro had relieved temporarily, he bore up vigorously against his weakness, and determined to have done with this dastardly terror, which he deemed unworthy of himself, — Henri II., a son of France, and a king !

Therefore he said to Gabriel with a firmness that was almost overdone, —

“Make your preparations, Monsieur, to run a course against me.”

Gabriel, whose whole being was in as confused and overwrought a state as that of the king, bowed without replying.

At that moment, Monsieur de Boisy, the grand equerry, approached the king and said to him that the queen had sent him to implore his Majesty to tilt no more that day for love of her.

"Say to the queen," replied Henri, "that it is just for love of her that I am going to run this one course."

Turning to Monsieur de Vieilleville, he said, —

"Come, Monsieur de Vieilleville, put on my armor at once."

In his preoccupation, he demanded from Monsieur de Vieilleville a service which was an attribute of the office of Monsieur de Boisy, the grand equerry, and Monsieur de Vieilleville in his surprise respectfully reminded him of that fact.

"To be sure!" said the king, putting his hand to his forehead. "What has become of my brains, I wonder?"

He met Gabriel's cold and statue-like glance, and continued impatiently, —

"But no, I was right. Was it not Monsieur de Boisy's place to finish his commission from the queen, by reporting my words to her? I knew perfectly well what I was doing and what I said! Give me my armor, Monsieur de Vieilleville."

"That being so, Sire," said Monsieur de Vieilleville, "and since your Majesty is absolutely determined to break one lance more, I beg to remind you that it is my turn to run against you, and I claim my right. In fact, Monsieur de Montgomery did not present himself at the opening of the lists, and only entered when he believed them closed."

"You are right, Monsieur," said Gabriel, earnestly; "and I will gladly withdraw, and give place to you."

But in the count's eagerness to shun the combat with him, the king persisted in fancying that he detected the insulting reflections of an enemy upon his courage.

"No, no!" he replied, stamping his foot on the ground. "It is against Monsieur de Montgommery and no other that I propose to run this course, and there has been enough delay! Give me my armor."

He met the count's fixed, stern gaze with a proud and haughty glance, and without more words he put his head forward that Monsieur de Vieilleville might adjust his casque.

Clearly his destiny had blinded him.

Monsieur de Savoie came to renew Catherine de Médicis's entreaties that the king would leave the field.

As Henri did not trouble himself to reply to these urgent representations, the duke added in a low tone, —

"Madame Diane de Poitiers, Sire, also asked me to warn you secretly to be on your guard against him with whom you are to dispute this bout."

At Diane's name, Henri started in spite of himself, but again he repressed his emotion.

"Shall I show myself a craven, then, before my beloved?" he asked himself.

And he maintained the dignified silence of one who is importuned to depart from an unalterable resolution.

Meanwhile, Monsieur de Vieilleville, while adjusting his armor, took occasion to say to him beneath his breath, —

"Sire, I swear by the living God that for three nights I have dreamed of nothing but that some mishap would befall you to-day, and that this last day of June would be a fatal one for you."¹

¹ "Mémoires de Vincent Carloix," secretary to Monsieur de Vieilleville.

But the king did not appear to have heard him; he was already armed, and he seized his lance.

Gabriel was handed his, and also entered the lists.

The two combatants mounted their horses and took the field.

A deep, awful silence pervaded the entire assemblage; all eyes were so intent upon the spectacle before them that breathing seemed almost to be suspended.

However, the constable and Diane de Castro being absent, every one in that vast throng, except Madame de Poitiers, was in ignorance of the fact that there were between the king and the Comte de Montgommery any causes of enmity or any wrongs to be avenged. No one clearly foreboded a bloody issue to a mock combat. The king, accustomed to these sports unattended with danger, had shown himself in the arena a hundred times within three days, under conditions which apparently differed in no respect from those existing at this moment.

And yet there was a vague sensation of something awe-inspiring and out of the common course in this adversary who had remained shrouded in mystery until the very end, in his significant reluctance to enter the lists, — likewise in the king's stubborn obstinacy; and in the face of this unknown danger, every one waited in breathless silence. Why? No one could have told. But a stranger arriving at that moment, and observing the expression on every face, would have said, —

“Some critical event is about to take place.”

There was terror in the very air.

One extraordinary circumstance demonstrated clearly the sinister complexion of the thoughts of the throng.

In ordinary combats, and as long as they lasted, the clarions and trumpets never ceased their deafening

flourishes. They were the very incarnation of the spirit of enjoyment that pervaded the tournament.

But when the king and Gabriel entered the lists, the trumpets suddenly, as if by common consent, were still; not a sound was to be heard from one of them, and the pervading horrified expectancy became doubly painful in that unwonted silence.

The two champions felt even more than the spectators the influence of these extraordinary tokens of disquiet which seemed to fill the air, so to speak.

Gabriel no longer thought or saw, — in fact, he hardly breathed. He went on mechanically and as if in a dream, doing by instinct what he had formerly done under similar circumstances, but guided in some measure by a secret and potent will, which surely was not his own.

The king was even more passive and lost in abstraction than he. He also seemed to have a sort of cloud before his eyes, and had the appearance of acting and moving in a mental phantasmagoria, which was neither reality nor a dream.

Every now and then a ray of light shone in upon his brain, so that he reviewed clearly and all at once the predictions which the queen had made two days before, as well as those of his horoscope, and those of Forcatel. Suddenly, by the help of some awe-inspiring gleam of intelligence, he understood the meaning and the correlation of all those ominous auguries. A cold sweat bathed him from head to foot. For an instant he felt an almost irresistible impulse to give up the combat and leave the lists; but the thousands of eyes that were gazing eagerly upon him nailed him to his place.

Moreover, Monsieur de Vieilleville was just giving the signal for the onset.

The die was cast. Forward! and God's will be done!

The two horses set off at a gallop, at that moment being more intelligent and less blinded perhaps than their riders, heavily barbed and armored.

Gabriel and the king met in the centre of the arena. Their lances came together and were shattered upon their shields, and they passed on without any other mishap.

So the presentiments of evil had been false ! There was a great murmur of satisfaction uttered with one accord by all those lightened hearts. The queen cast a grateful glance toward heaven.

But their rejoicing was premature.

The horsemen were still within the lists. After having galloped each to the opposite end from that at which he had entered, they must return to their respective points of departure, and thus meet a second time.

But what danger was to be apprehended now ? They would pass without coming in contact.

But whether because of his anxiety, whether it was by intention or by accident (for who besides God can tell the reason ?), Gabriel, when he rode back, did not throw away, as the custom was, the broken shaft of the lance, which had been left in his hand. He carried it lowered in front of him.

As he rode along at a gallop, the shaft came in contact with Henri's head.

The visor of the casque was broken by the force of the blow, and the lance pierced the king's eye and came out at his ear.

Not more than half of the spectators, who were already rising to leave the lists, witnessed that fearful blow ; but those who did gave utterance to a loud cry, which told the others.

Meanwhile Henri had let his reins drop from his hands, and clinging to his horse's neck, had reached the end of



the arena, where Messieurs de Vieilleville and de Boisy were waiting to receive him.

"Ah, I am killed!" were the king's first words.

Then he muttered, —

"Let no one molest Monsieur de Montgommery! It was no more than just — I forgive him."

And with that he lost consciousness.

We will not try to depict the confusion that ensued. Catherine de Médicis was carried from the spot, half dead with grief and terror. The king was at once borne to his own apartment at the Tournelles, without regaining consciousness for an instant.

Gabriel dismounted and stood leaning against the barrier as motionless as if turned to stone, and seemingly overcome with horror at the blow he had struck.

The king's last words had been understood and repeated, and no one ventured to molest Gabriel; but every one around was whispering, and looking askance at him in awe.

Admiral de Coligny, who had been a spectator of the tournament, alone had courage to approach the young count; and as he passed by at his left side, he said to him in a low voice, —

"A terrible accident, my friend! I know well that it was all chance; our ideas and the speeches you heard, as La Renaudie has informed me, at the meeting in the Place Maubert, surely had no connection with this fatality. No matter! although you cannot be punished for what was but an accident, be on your guard. I advise you to disappear for a time, and to get away from Paris, if not from France. Rely always upon me; *au revoir*."

"Thanks," Gabriel replied without moving.

A mournful and feeble smile flickered about his

colorless lips while the Protestant leader was speaking to him.

Coligny nodded to him, and went on.

Some moments later, the Duc de Guise, who had superintended the king's removal, also came toward Gabriel, as he was giving certain orders to the attendants.

He passed very near the young count, on the right side, and as he passed, whispered in his ear, —

“An unfortunate blow, Gabriel! But no one can blame you for it; you are only to be pitied. But just think! if any one had overheard our conversation at the Tournelles, what fearful conjectures the evil-disposed might draw from this very easily explained but very distressing accident! But it makes no difference, for I am powerful now; and I am always your friend, as you know. However, do not show yourself for a few days; but do not leave Paris, — that would be useless. If any one should dare to make a criminal accusation against you, remember what I say to you: rely upon me everywhere and always, and in any emergency.”

“Thanks, Monseigneur,” said Gabriel again, in the same tone, and with the same melancholy smile.

It was very clear that both the Duc de Guise and Coligny had, not an absolute conviction, but a vague suspicion, that the accident which they pretended to deplore had not been altogether unintentional. In their hearts, the religious zealot and the ambitious noble, without wishing to do violence to their respective consciences, were satisfied, — the latter that Gabriel had seized at any risk the opportunity to make himself useful to the fortune of a patron whom he adored, and the former that the fanaticism of the young Huguenot had attained sufficient strength to urge him on to deliver his oppressed brethren from their persecutor.

Therefore both felt in duty bound to say a few words to their discreet and devoted auxiliary ; and that explains why they had, one after the other, approached him as we have related, and Gabriel's appreciation of their motives had made him receive their double error with that sad smile.

Meanwhile the Duc de Guise had returned to the anxious groups who were standing around. Gabriel cast a glance about him, saw the alarmed curiosity with which he was regarded, and with a deep sigh determined to leave the fatal spot.

He returned to his house in the Rue des Jardins St. Paul without molestation or question.

At the Tournelles the king's apartment was closed to everybody except the queen and their children and the surgeons who had come to the relief of the royal patient.

But Fernel and all the other doctors very soon recognized the fact that there was no hope, and that Henri II. must die.

Ambroise Paré was at Peronne, and it did not occur to the Duc de Guise to send for him.

The king lay in an unconscious state for four days.

On the fifth day he came to himself sufficiently to give some orders, — notably to command that his sister's marriage should be celebrated at once.

He saw the queen also, and made certain suggestions to her concerning his children and the affairs of the kingdom.

Then fever seized him ; he became delirious, and suffered torments.

At last, on the 10th of July, 1559, on the day following that on which, in accordance with his last wish, his weeping sister Marguerite had married the Duke of

Savoy, Henri II. breathed his last, after eleven long days of agony.

The same day Madame Diane de Castro took her departure, or rather her flight, for her old home,—the Benedictine convent at St. Quentin, which had been reopened after the peace of Cateau-Cambrésis.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

. A NEW ORDER OF AFFAIRS.

FOR the mistress, as well as for the favorite male dependant of a king, true death comes, not with death itself, but with disgrace.

Consequently the son of the Comte de Montgomery might feel that he had taken ample vengeance for his father's horrible entombment and death upon both the constable and Diane de Poitiers, if through his instrumentality those two guilty ones should fall from power to exile, and from lofty and brilliant position to obscurity.

It was this result that Gabriel was still awaiting in the gloomy and anxious solitude of his dwelling, where he had buried himself after the fatal blow of June 30. It was not his own punishment that he dreaded, if Montmorency and his accomplice should remain in power, but he loathed the thought of their chastisement being remitted. He therefore waited.

During the eleven days that elapsed before Henri's agony was relieved by death, the Constable de Montmorency had put forth every effort to retain his share of influence in the government. He had written to all the princes of the blood, urging them to take their seats in the council of the young king. Above all, he had impressed the consequence of this proceeding upon Antoine de Bourbon, King of Navarre, the next heir to the throne after the king's brothers. He had written him

to make all haste, inasmuch as the least delay would enable strangers to assume a supremacy from which they could not afterward be easily dislodged. In fact, he had sent couriers here and there in all directions, urging some and imploring others, and had omitted nothing in his vigorous attempts to form a party capable of making head against that of the Guises.

Diane de Poitiers, despite her deep affliction, had done her best to second his efforts, for her fate now was indissolubly connected with that of her old lover.

With him in power she might still reign, to good effect at all events, although not openly.

When, on the 10th of July, 1559, the eldest son of Henri II. was proclaimed king by the herald-at-arms, under the name of François II., the young prince was only sixteen; and although he had in the eyes of the law attained his majority, his youth and inexperience, as well as his feeble health, would compel him, for several years at least, to relinquish the conduct of affairs to a minister who in his name would be far more powerful than himself.

Now who should be that minister, — say rather, that tutor, — the Duc de Guise or the constable; Catherine de Médicis or Antoine de Bourbon?

That was the question of absorbing interest on the day following the death of Henri II.

On that day François II. was to receive the deputies of parliament at three o'clock. The person whose name he should present to them as that of his minister might well be saluted by them as their real sovereign.

All energies were therefore bent in that direction; and on the morning of the 12th of July Catherine de Médicis and François de Lorraine both waited upon the young king, upon the pretext that they had come to offer him

their condolence, but really to whisper their advice into his ear.

The widow of Henri II., with such an important end in view, had even broken through the etiquette which required that she should remain in seclusion for forty days.

Catherine de Médicis, although slighted and cast aside by her husband, had felt for the last twelve years the first symptoms of that vast and far-reaching ambition which governed the rest of her life.

But since she could not be regent over a king who had attained his majority, her only chance was to reign by the hand of a minister who was devoted to her interests.

The Constable de Montmorency would not meet the occasion ; for he had under the late reign contributed in no slight degree to the substitution of the influence of Diane de Poitiers for that which Catherine might legitimately have exercised. The queen-mother had not forgiven his actions in that regard, and thought much more seriously about chastising him for his always harsh and often cruel treatment of her.

Antoine de Bourbon would have been a more docile instrument in her hands ; but he was of the Reformed religion, and his wife, Jeanne d'Albret, had her own ambition to satisfy ; and then, too, his title as a prince of the blood might arouse dangerous desires in him if conjoined with the real power of a minister.

The Duc de Guise remained ; but would François de Lorraine acknowledge with good grace the queen-mother's right to exercise a sort of moral authority, or would he refuse to admit anybody to a share in his power ?

The last point was one on which Catherine was very anxious to be enlightened ; and so she welcomed with joy

the prospect of an interview in the king's presence which chance had brought about between her and the duke on the morning in question.

She determined to find or to invent opportunities to test Le Balafre, and to ascertain his disposition toward her.

But the Duc de Guise was no less expert in politics than in war, and maintained a careful watch upon himself.

This prologue to the drama took place at the Louvre, in the royal apartment where François II. had been installed the day before; and the only *dramatis personæ* were the queen-mother, Le Balafre, the young king, and Mary Stuart.

François and his youthful queen contrasted with the cold and selfish ambitions of Catherine and the Duc de Guise were like two fascinating children, frankly and ingenuously in love with each other, and ready to bestow their confidence upon the first passer-by who should be adroit enough to win their hearts.

They were in sincere affliction for the death of the king their father; and Catherine found them very sad and cast down.

"My son," said she to François, "it is well for you to shed these tears to the memory of him whom you, above all others, should regret. You know that I share your bitter grief. However, you must remember that you have other duties than those of a son to fulfil. You are also a father, — the father of your people. After you have paid this fitting tribute of sorrow to the past, turn your face to the future. Remember that you are king, my son, — I should say your Majesty, to use a form of address which will remind you of your duties and your rights at the same time."

"Alas!" said François, shaking his head, "it is a very heavy burden, Madame, this sceptre of France, for the hands of sixteen years to carry; and nothing warned me to expect that my inexperienced and light-minded youth would so soon be overwhelmed with such a weighty responsibility."

"Sire," Catherine replied, "accept with resignation and gratitude the office which God lays upon you; it will be for those who surround and love you to lighten your burden to the best of their ability, and to add their efforts to your own to assist you to bear it worthily."

"Madame, I thank you," murmured the young king, much embarrassed to know what reply to make to these advances.

Mechanically he glanced toward the Duc de Guise, as if to ask the advice of his wife's uncle.

At his very first step as king, even in his mother's presence, the poor youth, with the crown on his head, seemed instinctively to appreciate the pitfalls which lay in his path.

But the Duc de Guise said, with no sign of hesitation, —

"Yes, Sire; your Majesty is right, — thank the queen, thank her with all your heart, for her kind and encouraging words. But be not content with being grateful to her; tell her boldly that among those who love you and whom you love she occupies the foremost place, and that for that reason you ought to and do rely upon her invaluable maternal co-operation in the difficult task which you have been called upon so young to undertake."

"My uncle De Guise is a faithful interpreter of my thoughts, Madame," said the delighted young king to his mother; "and even if I do not repeat his words for fear that I may weaken their force, consider them, I pray,

Madame and beloved mother, as if I had myself uttered them, and vouchsafe to promise me your priceless help in my weakness."

The queen-mother had already favored the Duc de Guise with a grateful and approving glance.

"Sire," she said to her son, "the little talent that I can boast of is at your service, and I shall be proud and happy every time that you care to consult me. But I am only a woman; and you need beside your throne a defender who knows how to wield a sword. The strong arm and manly vigor that are requisite your Majesty will doubtless discover among those whose alliance and relationship make you look naturally to them for support."

Thus Catherine lost no time in paying her debt to the Duc de Guise for his fair words.

A tacit bargain was thus made between them by a single glance; but let us say at once that it was not sincerely entered into on either side, and was not destined, as we shall see, to be of long duration.

The young king understood his mother, and encouraged by a glance from Mary, held out his hand timidly to Le Balafre.

With that grasp of the hand he conferred upon him the government of France.

However, Catherine de Médicis did not choose to allow her son to bind himself prematurely, nor until the Duc de Guise had given to herself certain pledges of his goodwill.

So she anticipated the king, who would probably have gone on to confirm his confidential impulse by some formal promise, and was the first to speak.

"In any event, Sire, before you have a minister, your mother has, not a favor to ask at your hands, but a demand to make."

"Say, then, a command, Madame," replied François.
"Speak, I beg you."

"Well, then, my son," Catherine continued, "I refer to a woman who has done me much harm, but has injured France even more. It is not for us to censure the failings of one who is more than ever sacred in our eyes now. But unfortunately your father is no more, Sire; his will is no longer supreme in this château; and yet this woman, whom I will not call by name, dares still to remain here, and to inflict upon me the outrage of her presence even to the end. During the king's protracted unconsciousness, it was suggested to her that it was not decent for her to remain at the Louvre. 'Is the king dead?' she asked. 'No, he still breathes.' 'Very well! none but he has the right to give orders to me.' And she had the brazen impudence to remain."

The Duc de Guise interrupted the queen-mother at this point, and hastened to say, —

"Pardon me, Madame, but I think that I know his Majesty's intentions with regard to her of whom you are speaking."

Without other preamble, he struck a bell, and a valet appeared.

"Let Madame de Poitiers be informed," said he, "that the king wishes to speak with her at once."

The valet bowed, and withdrew to carry out the order.

The young monarch gave no sign whatever of surprise or dissatisfaction at seeing his authority thus taken from his hands without a word from him. The fact is that he was overjoyed at anything that tended to lessen his responsibility, and release him from the necessity of giving orders or acting as king.

However, Le Balafré thought best to give to his proceeding the sanction of royal approbation.

"I trust I do not presume too far, Sire," he continued, "in feeling confident of your Majesty's wishes touching this matter?"

"No, surely not, my dear uncle," François replied eagerly. "Go on, pray. I know beforehand that whatever you do will be well done."

"And what you say is well said, darling," whispered Mary Stuart, softly, in her husband's ear.

François blushed with pride and pleasure. For a word or a glance of approbation from his adored Mary he would, in very truth, have bartered and abandoned all the kingdoms on earth.

The queen-mother awaited with impatient curiosity the course which the Duc de Guise proposed to adopt.

She thought best, however, to add, as much to break the silence as to better signify her own purpose, —

"She whom you have sent for, Sire, may well, in my opinion, leave the Louvre in the possession of the only legitimate queen of the late king, as well as the charming queen of the present one;" here she bowed graciously to Mary Stuart. "Has not this beautiful and wealthy lady her superb royal Château d'Anet, where she can seek shelter and consolation?—a much more royal and superb establishment, certainly, than my modest dwelling of Chaumont-sur-Loire."

The Duc de Guise said nothing, but did not fail to note down that hint in his mind.

We must avow that he hated Diane de Poitiers no less bitterly than Catherine de Médicis did. For it was Madame de Valentinois who up to that time, to please the constable, had used all her influence to hinder and frustrate Le Balafre's fortune and his schemes; and she doubtless would have succeeded in relegating him forever into obscurity if Gabriel's lance had not shattered the enchant-

ress's power when it struck down Henri II. in the prime of life.

But François de Lorraine's day of vengeance had come at last, and he knew how to hate as well as to love.

At this moment the usher announced in a loud voice, —
“Madame le Duchesse de Valentinois.”

Diane de Poitiers entered, evidently in much anxiety, but with her head still erect as of yore.

CHAPTER XXXV.

RESULTS OF GABRIEL'S VENGEANCE.

MADAME DE VALENTINOIS made a slight reverence to the young king, a still slighter one to Catherine de Médicis and Mary Stuart, but seemed not to see the Duc de Guise.

"Sire," said she, "your Majesty has sent me your commands to appear before you —"

She checked herself. François II., at once indignant and embarrassed by the insolent bearing of the ex-favorite, hesitated, blushed, and finally said, —

"Our uncle De Guise has consented to take it upon himself to make known our intentions with regard to you, Madame."

Diane turned slowly toward Le Balafré, and seeing the bitter, mocking smile which was playing about his lips, tried to wither him with the most imperious of her Juno-like glances.

But Le Balafré was much less easily frightened than his royal nephew.

"Madame," said he to Diane, after bestowing a profound salute upon her, "the king has noticed your sincere grief, caused by the terrible calamity which has overwhelmed us all. He is grateful to you for it. His Majesty trusts that he anticipates your dearest wish by permitting you to leave the court for a more retired spot. You are at liberty to go as soon as you find it convenient; this evening, for instance."

A tear of rage appeared in Diane's flaming eye.

"His Majesty has gratified my most earnest desire," said she. "What is there here for me to do now? I have nothing so much at heart as to withdraw to my place of exile, Monsieur, at the earliest possible moment, never fear!"

"Everything turns out for the best, then," replied the Duc de Guise, carelessly playing with the knots of his velvet cloak. "But, Madame," he added more gravely, and imparting to his words the significant accent of an order, "your Château d'Anet, which you owe to the benevolence of the late king, is something too worldly, too exposed, and too frivolous a retreat for a desolate recluse like yourself. Therefore Queen Catherine offers you in exchange for it her Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire, which is farther from Paris, and proportionately better suited to your present tastes and needs, I presume. It will be at your disposal as soon as you desire."

Madame de Poitiers very well understood that this pretended exchange was simply a mask to cover an arbitrary confiscation. But what could she do? How resist? She no longer possessed either influence or power. All her friends of the day before were her enemies of to-day. She must needs bow to fate, and she did so.

"I shall be only too happy," said she, in a hollow voice, "to offer to the queen the magnificent domain which I owe to the generosity of her royal spouse."

"I accept the reparation, Madame," said Catherine de Médicis, dryly, casting a disdainful glance at Diane, and one full of gratitude to the Duc de Guise.

In truth, it was he who presented Anet to her.

"The Château de Chaumont-sur-Loire is at your dis-

posal, Madame," she added, "and shall be put in condition to receive its new proprietress worthily."

"And there," resumed the Duc de Guise, meeting the withering glances with which Diane was favoring him by a little harmless raillery, — "there, in peace, Madame, you may employ your leisure in resting from the weariness which has, I am informed, been caused during the last few days by your frequent correspondence and interviews with Monsieur de Montmorency."

"I did not think that I was doing a disservice to him who was then king," Diane retorted, "by conferring with the great statesman and great warrior of his reign as to whatever concerned the welfare of the kingdom."

In her eagerness to repay sharp words in kind, Madame de Poitiers did not reflect that she was thus furnishing arms against herself, and reminding Catherine de Médicis of her other enemy, the constable.

"It is true," said the relentless queen-mother: "Monsieur de Montmorency has shed the light of his glory and his good works upon two entire reigns; and it is full time, my son," she added, addressing the young king, "that you should consider how you may assure him also the honorable retirement he has so laboriously earned."

"Monsieur de Montmorency," Diane retorted bitterly, "agreed with me in anticipating such an acknowledgment and recompense of his long and arduous services. He was with me when your Majesty commanded my presence. He is probably still in my apartments, and I will seek him there, and notify him of the generous consideration that is in store for him; he should come at once to offer his gratitude to the king with his leave-taking. And he is a man, remember; he is constable, and one of the powerful noblemen of the realm! Rest

assured that sooner or later he will find an opportunity to demonstrate more forcibly than by words his profound gratitude to a king so filled with pious regard for the past, and to the new advisers who show themselves such valuable assistants in the work of justice and of public interest which he has at heart."

"A threat!" said Le Balafré to himself. "The viper squirms under the heel. Oh, well, so much the better! I prefer it so!"

"The king is always ready to receive Monsieur le Connétable," observed the queen-mother, pale with rage. "And if Monsieur le Connétable has any demands to present to his Majesty's consideration, or any observations to address to him, he has but to come forward. He will be listened to, and, as you say, Madame, justice will be done!"

"I will send him hither at once," was Madame de Poitiers's defiant reply.

She again bestowed a superb bow upon the king and the two queens, and left the room, with head still erect, but wounded to her very soul, — with pride on her features, but death at her heart.

If Gabriel could have seen her, he would have felt sufficiently revenged upon her.

Even Catherine de Médicis, at the price of that humiliation, consented to forego any further reprisals against Diane!

But the queen-mother had noticed with some uneasiness that at the name of the constable the Duc de Guise had remained silent, and had paid no further attention to Madame de Poitiers's irritating insolence.

Could it be that Le Balafré feared Monsieur de Montmorency, and wished to spare him? Would he, in case of need, form an alliance with Catherine's old foe?

It was essential that the Florentine should know what to expect in that direction before she allowed the power to fall without resistance into the hands of François de Lorraine.

Therefore, in order to ascertain his views and those of the king as well, she remarked, after Diane had gone :

"Madame de Poitiers is very impudent, and seems very strong in her reliance upon her constable. Be sure, my son, that if you allow Monsieur de Montmorency to retain any authority, be it much or little, he will share it with Madame Diane."

Still the Duc de Guise said nothing.

"As for me," continued Catherine, "if I were to offer my opinion to your Majesty, it would be that you should not divide your confidence among several persons, but that you should select for your sole minister either Monsieur de Montmorency or your uncle De Guise or your uncle De Bourbon, as you choose. But let it be one or the other, and not all. Let there be only one will in the State,—that of the king, advised by the small number of persons who have no other interest than in its welfare and glory. Is not that your opinion, Monsieur de Lorraine?"

"Yes, Madame, if it is yours," replied the duke, condescendingly.

"Aha!" said Catherine to herself, "I guessed aright: he was thinking of allying himself with the constable. But he must decide between him and me, and I think he cannot hesitate long.

"It seems to me, Monsieur de Guise," she continued aloud, "that you ought to share my opinion so much the more fully, because it will be to your advantage; for the king knows my thought, and that it is neither the Constable de Montmorency nor Antoine de Navarre whom I

would like to have him select for his adviser; and when I thus declare my sentiments in favor of the exclusion of a multiplicity of advisers, I do not aim my remarks against you."

"Madame," said the Duc de Guise, "accept with my heartfelt gratitude my no less entire devotion."

The subtle politician emphasized the last words, as if he had made up his mind and had definitely sacrificed the constable to Catherine.

"That is very well," said the queen-mother. "When these gentlemen of the parliament arrive, it is fitting that they should find among us this rare and affecting unanimity of views and feelings."

"I, above all others, am overjoyed at this cordial agreement," cried the young king, clapping his hands. "With my mother to advise me and my uncle for minister, I begin to feel on better terms with this royalty which terrified me so at first."

"We will reign *en famille*," added Mary Stuart, gayly.

Catherine de Médicis and François de Lorraine smiled pityingly at these hopes—illusions, rather—of the young king and queen. Each of them had for the moment what they most desired,—he the certainty that the queen-mother would not object to allowing the supreme power to be intrusted to him, and she the belief that the minister would share his supreme power with her.

Meanwhile Monsieur de Montmorency was announced.

The constable, it must be said, was at first more dignified and calm than Madame de Valentinois. Doubtless he had been forewarned by her, and had determined at least to fall with colors flying.

He bowed respectfully before François II., and began at once to speak.

"Sire," said he, "I anticipated that the old servant of

your father and grandfather would meet with little favor from you. I have no complaint to make of this sudden change of fortune which I foresaw ; I will go into retirement without a murmur. If the king or France ever have need of me, I shall be found at Chantilly, Sire ; and my property, my children, and my own life, — all that I possess will always be at your Majesty's service."

This moderation seemed to move the young king, who, more embarrassed than ever, turned in his distress to his mother.

But the Duc de Guise, feeling that no intervention could so surely turn the old constable's reserve to anger as his own, interposed with the most courteous formality of manner, —

"Since Monsieur de Montmorency is about to quit the court, he would do well, I think, before his departure, to hand to his Majesty the royal seal, which the late king intrusted to him, and which we need from this time."

Le Balafre was not mistaken. These apparently simple words excited the jealous constable's wrath to the highest pitch.

"Here is the seal," he said bitterly, as he produced it from beneath his doublet. "I intended to hand it to his Majesty without requiring him to ask it of me ; but I see that his Majesty is surrounded by persons disposed to advise him to heap insults upon those who deserve nothing but gratitude."

"To whom does Monsieur de Montmorency mean to refer?" asked Catherine, haughtily.

"What? I spoke of those by whom his Majesty is surrounded, Madame," snarled the constable, giving the rein to his natural testiness and brutality.

But he had chosen his time ill ; and Catherine was only awaiting an opportunity to burst out.

She rose, and casting all decorum to the winds, began to reproach the constable for the harsh and disdainful manner he had always adopted toward her, his hostility for everything Florentine, the preference which he had openly shown to the mistress over the lawful wife. She was not ignorant of the fact that it was to him that all the humiliation suffered by her countrymen who had followed her to France was to be attributed. She knew, too, that during the early years of her married life Montmorency had had the hardihood to suggest to Henri that he should cast her off as being barren, and that since then he had basely slandered her.

To this the constable, who was little accustomed to reproof, replied with a sneer, which was in itself a fresh affront.

Meanwhile the Duc de Guise had had time to take François II.'s orders, or rather to dictate those orders to him in a low tone; and now, calmly raising his voice, he proceeded to crush his rival, to the unbounded delight of Catherine de Médicis.

"Monsieur le Connétable," said he, with his jeering courtesy, "your friends and creatures who sit with you at the council-board — Bochetel, L'Aubespine, and the rest, notably his Eminence the Keeper of the Seals, Jean Bertrandi — may probably prefer to imitate you in your longing for retirement. The king desires you to express his gratitude to them. To-morrow they will be quite at liberty, and their places will have been filled."

"'Tis well," muttered Monsieur de Montmorency between his clinched teeth.

"As for your nephew, Monsieur de Coligny, who is at once governor of Picardy and of the Île de France," continued Le Balafre, "the king considers that the double task is altogether too heavy for one man, and desires to

relieve him of one of his governments at his choice. You will have the kindness to notify Monsieur l'Amiral to that effect, will you not?"

"To be sure," rejoined the constable, with a bitter sneer.

"As for yourself, Monsieur le Connétable—" the duke continued quietly.

"Am I to be deprived of my constable's bâton?" interrupted Monsieur de Montmorency, sharply.

"Oh," replied François de Lorraine, "you know that it is impossible, and that the office of constable is not like that of lieutenant-general of the kingdom, but that the former is conferred for life. However, is it not incompatible with that of grand master, which you also hold? It seems to be so to his Majesty, who asks for your resignation of the last-named charge, Monsieur, and deigns to confer it upon me, since I have no other."

"It is for the best," retorted Montmorency, grinding his teeth. "Is that all, Monsieur?"

"Why, yes; I think so," said the Duc de Guise, resuming his seat.

The constable felt that it would be difficult for him to restrain his rage any longer, — that he should perhaps make a scene, and by failing in respect for the king become a rebellious subject instead of a disgraced one. He did not wish to afford his triumphant foe that satisfaction; so he saluted the king abruptly, and made ready to take his leave.

However, before departing, and as if thinking better of his determination, —

"Sire," said he, "allow me one word more, to fulfil my last duty to the memory of your glorious father. He who struck the fatal blow, the author of all our grief, was not perhaps simply careless, Sire, — at least I have reason to

think so. In this melancholy catastrophe there may have been — in my opinion, there was — an element of criminal intent. The man whom I accuse did, I know, consider himself wronged by the late king. Your Majesty will without doubt order a strict inquiry into this matter.”

The Duc de Guise was alarmed at this formal and dangerous charge against Gabriel ; but Catherine de Médicis took it upon herself to reply.

“Be assured, Monsieur,” said she to the constable, “that your intervention was not needed to remind us of such a deed as that ; for the necessity of dealing promptly with the offender is not forgotten by those to whom the kingly existence so cruelly terminated was quite as precious as to you. I, the widow of Henri II., cannot yield to any other person in the world the initiative in such a matter. Therefore be quite easy, Monsieur ; your solicitude is premature. You may withdraw with your mind at rest on that point.”

“I have nothing further to say, then,” said the constable.

He was not even to be allowed to gratify in person his implacable resentment to the Comte de Montgommery, and to pose as the denouncer of the culprit and the avenger of his master.

Suffocated with shame and anger, he went from the royal presence in despair.

He departed the same evening for his estate at Chantilly.

That day Madame de Valentinois also quitted the Louvre, where she had been more of a queen than the queen herself, for her gloomy and distant exile at Chaumont-sur-Loire, whence she never returned while she lived.

Thus Gabriel's vengeance upon Madame de Poitiers was complete.

It is true that the ex-favorite had in store a terrible vengeance for him who had thus hurled her from her lofty position.

As for the constable, Gabriel had not done with him, but would be on the watch for the day when he should regain his influence.

However, we will not anticipate events, but return in haste to the Louvre, where the deputies of parliament are just being announced to François II.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHANGE OF TEMPERATURE.

IN accordance with Catherine de Médicis's wish, the deputies found the most perfect unanimity of sentiment prevailing at the Louvre. François II., his wife at his right hand, and his mother at his left, presented the Duc de Guise to them as lieutenant-general of the kingdom, the Cardinal of Lorraine as superintendent of the finances, and François Olivier as keeper of the seals. Le Balafré was triumphant, the queen-mother smiled upon his triumph, and everything went off as smoothly as possible; and no suspicion of a misunderstanding appeared to cast a shadow upon the fortunate auspices which inaugurated this reign, which bade fair to be as long as its opening was happy.

One of the councillors of the parliament apparently thought that a suggestion of clemency would not be ill-timed amid so much happiness, and as he passed before the king with a group of others he cried, —

“Mercy for Anne Dubourg!”

But the good councillor forgot how zealous a Catholic the new minister was. Le Balafré, as his habit was, pretended to have misunderstood; and without going through the formality of consulting the king or the queen-mother, so sure was he of their approbation, he replied in a loud, firm voice, —

“Yes, Messieurs, yes; the prosecution of Anne Dubourg and those accused with him will be at once taken up and carried to its close, never fear!”

With this assurance, the members of parliament left the Louvre, sad or joyous according to their respective opinions, but all convinced that never were the governing powers more united in sentiment and better pleased with one another than those to whom they had just paid their respects.

After their departure, the Duc de Guise still noticed upon Catherine's lips the smile which every time that she glanced at him seemed to be stereotyped there.

François II. rose from his seat, tired out with the formalities he had gone through.

"At last we are done for to-day, I trust, with business and ceremony," said he. "Mother, uncle, may we not one of these days leave Paris for a while, and pass the balance of our period of mourning at Blois, for instance, on the banks of the Loire, that Mary loves so dearly? Oh, can we not, tell me?"

"Oh, do try to make it possible!" said Mary Stuart. "In these lovely summer days Paris is so wearisome and the country so charming!"

"Monsieur de Guise will attend to that," said Catherine. "But your labors are not yet quite at an end for to-day, my son; before I leave you to yourself I must ask for half an hour more of your time, for you have a sacred duty yet to perform."

"What is it, Mother?" asked François.

"A duty which devolves upon you as the guardian of public justice, Sire," said Catherine, — "the same one in which Monsieur le Connétable flattered himself that he would anticipate me; but a wife's justice is keener than a friend's."

"What does she mean?" the Duc de Guise asked himself, in alarm.

"Sire, your august father died a violent death. The

man who dealt the blow either is simply an unfortunate wretch or a culprit. For my own part, I incline to the latter supposition; but in any event the question is worth the trouble of solving. If we treat such an attack with indifference, without even taking pains to ascertain whether it was involuntary or not, what risks do not all kings run, — you, above all, Sire? Therefore an inquiry into what is called the ‘accident’ of the 30th of June is essential.”

“But in that case,” said Le Balafré, “it would be necessary to order Monsieur de Montgomery’s arrest at once, Madame, as a regicide.”

“Monsieur de Montgomery has been under arrest since morning,” said Catherine.

“Under arrest! And upon whose order, pray?” cried the Duc de Guise.

“Upon mine,” replied the queen-mother. “There was no regularly constituted authority at that time, and I took it upon myself to issue that order. Monsieur de Montgomery might take flight at any moment, and it was of the utmost importance to prevent it. He has been brought to the Louvre without disturbance or excitement. I ask you, my son, to question him.”

Without waiting for permission, she touched a bell, as the Duc de Guise had done two hours earlier. But this time Le Balafré scowled heavily; a storm was brewing.

“Order the prisoner to be brought hither,” said Catherine to the usher who appeared.

There was an embarrassing silence when the usher had left the room. The king seemed undecided, Mary Stuart anxious, and the Duc de Guise very much displeased. The queen-mother alone affected an air of dignity and assurance.

The Duc de Guise alone broke the silence with these words, —

“It seems to me that if Monsieur de Montgomery had desired to make his escape, nothing would have been easier during the last fortnight.”

Catherine had no time to reply, for Gabriel was led in at that moment.

He was pale but composed. That morning very early four armed domestics had come to seek him at his house, to the great dismay of Aloyse. He had accompanied them without any attempt at resistance, and since then had awaited events without apparent anxiety.

When Gabriel entered the apartment with a firm step and tranquil bearing, the young king changed color, whether from emotion at sight of him who had stricken his father to death, or from alarm at having for the first time to perform the functions of dispenser of justice of which his mother had spoken, — in very truth the most awe-inspiring duty which the Lord has imposed upon the kings of the earth.

Consequently, it was with a scarcely audible voice that he said to Catherine, turning toward her, —

“Speak, Madame ; it is for you to speak.”

Catherine de Médicis made haste to avail herself of this permission. She now believed herself to be certain of her omnipotence with François and his minister. She addressed Gabriel in a haughty, magisterial tone.

“Monsieur,” said she, “we have thought fit, before any other steps were taken, to cause you to appear before his Majesty in person, and to question you with our own lips, so that there may be no necessity of offering you any reparation if we find you innocent, and that justice may be the more prompt and effective if we find you guilty. Extraordinary crimes demand extra-

ordinary tribunals. Are you ready to reply to our questions, Monsieur?"

"I am ready to listen to you, Madame," was Gabriel's reply.

Catherine was rather irritated than convinced by the calm demeanor of the man whom she had bitterly hated even before he had made her a widow, — whom she hated the more for all the love which for one moment she had felt for him. She continued with an offensive bitterness in her tone, —

"Several curious circumstances conspire to throw suspicion on you, Monsieur, and to accuse you, — your long absences from Paris, your voluntary exile from court for nearly two years, your presence and your mysterious demeanor at the fatal tournament, your very refusal to enter the lists against the king. How did it happen that you, who are accustomed to these sports and passages-at-arms, omitted the ordinary and necessary precaution of throwing away the shaft of your lance as you were riding back? How do you explain such strange forgetfulness? Answer! What have you to say to all this?"

"Nothing, Madame," said Gabriel.

"Nothing?" said the queen-mother, completely taken aback.

"Absolutely nothing."

"What!" rejoined Catherine; "you confess, then? You avow that —"

"I neither avow nor confess anything, Madame."

"Oho! then you deny?"

"Nor do I deny anything. I simply say nothing."

Mary Stuart could not restrain a movement of approbation. François II. listened and looked on with eager curiosity; and the Duc de Guise remained mute and motionless.

Catherine began again in a tone which became momentarily more and more biting, —

“Monsieur, be careful! You would do better, perhaps, to try to defend or justify your action. Understand one thing: Monsieur de Montmorency, who can, in case of need, be heard as a witness, declares that to his certain knowledge you might well have certain grievances against the king, some grounds for personal enmity.”

“What were they, Madame? Did Monsieur de Montmorency say what they were?”

“Not yet, but doubtless he will tell.”

“Very well! let him tell them, if he dares!” retorted Gabriel, with a proud but quiet smile.

“So you refuse altogether to speak, do you?” Catherine persisted.

“I refuse.”

“Do you know that the torture may bring your disdainful silence to terms?”

“I do not think it, Madame.”

“By proceeding in this way, you risk your life, I warn you.”

“I will not defend it, Madame. It is no longer worth the trouble.”

“You are fully determined, then, Monsieur? Not a word?”

“Not one single word, Madame,” said Gabriel, shaking his head.

“And quite right, too!” cried Mary Stuart, as if carried away by an irresistible impulse. “Noble and grand this silence is! It is the course of a gentleman who does not even choose to repel suspicion for fear that suspicion may fall upon him. I say, for my part, that this very refusal to speak is the most eloquent and convincing of justifications!”

During this outburst the old queen was gazing at the younger one with a stern and angry expression.

"Yes, I may be wrong to speak thus," continued Mary; "but I care not! I speak as I feel and as I think. My heart will never allow my lips to remain closed. My impressions and my emotions must find vent. My instinct is the only policy that I recognize, and it cries out to me now that Monsieur d'Exmès never conceived and executed such a crime in cold blood, but that he was only the blind instrument of fate, and believes himself to be above any other supposition, and therefore scorns to justify himself. My instinct tells me this, and I give it voice. Why not?"

The young king gazed joyfully and affectionately at his *mignonne*, as he called her, while she expressed herself with an eloquence and animation which made her twenty times more fascinating than usual.

Gabriel cried in a touched and penetrating voice, —

"Oh, thanks, Madame! I thank you! And you have done well; not on my account, but your own, you have done well to act thus."

"Indeed, I know it," replied Mary, with the most gracious accent that one could dream of.

"Well, have we reached the end of this sentimental childishness?" cried Catherine, indignantly.

"No, Madame," said Mary Stuart, wounded in her self-respect as a young wife and a young queen, "no; if you have made an end of your childishness, we, who are young, thank God! are only just beginning. Am I not right, my gentle Sire?" she added, turning prettily toward her youthful spouse.

The king did not reply in words, but touched with his lips the ends of the lovely fingers Mary held out to him.

Catherine's wrath, which she had restrained up to that time, now burst forth ; she had not yet succeeded in accustoming to treat as king a son who was still almost a child ; moreover, she believed herself to be secure in the support of the Duc de Guise, who had not declared himself thus far, and whom she did not know to be the devoted patron, and, we might almost say, a tacit accomplice of the Comte de Montgommery. Thus she dared to give free vent to her ire.

" Ah, this is the way matters stand ! " she said in reply to Mary Stuart's last words, which were slightly contemptuous. " I claim a right, and I am laughed at. I ask, in all moderation, that the murderer of Henri II. may at least be interrogated ; and when he declines to justify his act, his silence is approved, — nay, more, it is even applauded. Very well ! since things have come to such a pass, away with cowardly reserve and half-measures ! I proclaim myself aloud as the accuser of the Comte de Montgommery. Will the king refuse justice to his mother because she is his mother ? We will examine the constable, and Madame de Poitiers, too, if necessary ! The truth shall be brought to light ; and if secrets of State are involved in this affair, we will have the judgment and sentence kept secret. But the death of a king treacherously murdered before the eyes of all his subjects shall, at any price, be avenged."

During this harangue of the queen-mother, a sad and resigned smile played about Gabriel's lips.

He recalled, in his own mind, the last two lines of Nostradamus's prediction, —

" Enfin, l'aimera, puis las ! le tuera,
Dame du roy."

And so the prophecy, thus far so faithfully fulfilled,

was to be accomplished to the end! Catherine would cause the condemnation and death of him whom she had loved! Gabriel expected it, and was ready for it.

However, the Florentine, thinking perhaps that she might have gone too far, checked herself a moment; and turning with her most gracious manner to the Duc de Guise, who was still silent, she said, —

“But you say nothing, Monsieur de Guise. You are of my opinion, are you not?”

“No, Madame,” replied Le Balafre, slowly; “no, I confess that I am not of your opinion, and that is why I said nothing.”

“Ah, you too turn against me!” rejoined Catherine, in a hollow, threatening voice.

“I am so unfortunate as to disagree with you in this matter, Madame,” said the duke. “However, you see that until now I have been heartily with you, and that in everything concerning the constable and Madame de Valentinois I entirely agreed with your plans.”

“Yes, because they served your own,” muttered Catherine. “I see it now when it is too late.”

“But as for Monsieur de Montgommery,” continued Le Balafre, calmly, “I cannot conscientiously share in your feeling, Madame. It seems to me impossible to hold a brave and loyal gentleman answerable for a pure accident. Prosecution would result in a triumph for him, and his accusers would be confounded. And concerning the risks to which, in your opinion, Madame, the lives of our kings would be exposed by an indulgent mode of dealing which prefers to believe in misfortune rather than in crime, why, I am convinced, on the other hand, that the real danger would lie in making the people too familiar with the idea that royal lives are not held in such sacred reverence as they have supposed.”

"Doubtless these are very exalted political maxims," retorted Catherine, bitterly.

"I consider them true and in good sense, at all events, Madame," added Le Balafré; "and for all these reasons, and others besides, I am of opinion that what we ought now to do is to apologize to Monsieur de Montgomery for this arbitrary arrest, which happily has been kept secret, — more happily for us than for him; and when our apologies have been accepted, we have only to restore him to the world, free and honorable and honored as he was yesterday, and as he will be to-morrow and forever after. I have spoken."

"Superb!" sneered Catherine.

Turning sharply to the young king, she asked, —

"And does this fine opinion that we have just listened to happen to coincide with yours, my son?"

The demeanor of Mary Stuart, who was bestowing a grateful glance and smile upon the Duc de Guise, left François II. no room for hesitation.

"Yes, Mother," he replied, "I confess that my uncle's opinion is mine."

"And so you betray your father's memory, do you?" retorted Catherine, in a deep voice which she struggled to render unmoved.

"On the other hand, Madame, I respect it," said François. "My father's first words after his wound were to request that Monsieur de Montgomery should not be molested, were they not? And did he not, in one of his rare intervals of consciousness while he lay dying, repeat that request, or rather command? Allow his son, Madame, to obey him."

"Very well! and you thrust aside at the very beginning your mother's devout will —"

"Madame," interrupted the Duc de Guise, "allow me

to remind you of your own words, 'only one will in the kingdom.' "

"But I also said, Monsieur, that that of the minister should always be subordinate to that of the king," cried Catherine.

"Yes, Madame," observed Mary Stuart, "but you added, the king's will should be enlightened by those persons who are interested only in his glory and his welfare. Now, no one is more interested than I, his wife, in either of those subjects, I fancy; and I advise him, as my uncle De Guise does, to believe rather in the loyalty than in the perfidy of a tried and valiant subject, and not to begin his reign with an iniquitous act."

"Do you yield to such suggestions as these, my son?" Catherine asked once more.

"I yield to the voice of my conscience, Mother," replied the young king, with more firmness than could have been expected of him.

"Is this your last word, François?" continued Catherine. "Be careful! If you refuse your mother the first request that she makes of you; if you thus assume the attitude of an independent master toward her, and act like the docile instrument of others, — you may reign alone, with or without your faithful ministers. I will have nothing more to do with anything that concerns king or kingdom, but I will deprive you of the benefit of my experience and devotion. I will return to my retirement, and abandon you, my son. Consider, consider well!"

"We should deplore her retirement, but would resign ourselves to bear it," murmured Mary Stuart, in a low voice which none but François heard.

But the amorous, imprudent youth, like a faithful echo, repeated aloud, —

"We should deplore your retirement, but would resign ourselves to bear it, Madame."

"Ah, very good!" was all Catherine said.

Then she continued in a voice of suppressed rage, pointing at Gabriel, —

"As for that villain, I shall meet with him again, sooner or later."

"I know it, Madame," replied the young man, whose mind was still dwelling on the horoscope.

But Catherine heard him not.

In a perfect fury of wrath, she included the charming young king and queen and the Duc de Guise in a baleful glance, viperish and awful, — a fatal glance, wherein one might have read the promise of all the crimes dictated by Catherine's ambition and the whole sombre history of the last kings of the Valois line.

Without another word she left the room.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

GUISE AND COLIGNY.

AFTER Catherine de Médicis's departure, there was a moment of silence. The young king seemed amazed at his own hardihood ; while Mary, with the keen intuition of affection, could not avoid a shudder at the thought of the queen-mother's last threatening glance. The Duc de Guise was secretly delighted to find himself thus freed from an ambitious and dangerous associate before his first hour of authority was at an end.

Gabriel, who was the occasion of all this trouble, was the first to speak.

"Sire," said he, "and you, Madame, and you also, Monseigneur, I thank you with all my heart for your kind and generous treatment of a poor wretch whom Heaven itself has abandoned. But notwithstanding my profound gratitude, with which my heart is overflowing, I ask you of what use is it to turn aside danger and death from so mournful and hopeless an existence as mine? My life is of no value for any purpose, or to any person, not even myself. For that reason I would not have disputed Madame Catherine's right to take it, because henceforth it is useless to me."

He added sorrowfully in his own mind, "And because it may yet become a nuisance."

"Gabriel," the Duc de Guise rejoined, "your life has been gloriously and worthily lived in the past, and contains equal possibilities for the future. You are a man

of vigor and energy, such as are in great request by those who govern empires, and are seldom available."

"Then, too," the sweet and soothing voice of Mary Stuart chimed in, "yours is a great and noble heart, Monsieur de Montgommery. I have known you for a long while, and Madame de Castro and myself have very often talked together about you."

"In short," observed François II., "your past services, Monsieur, justify me in relying upon you for like services in the future. The embers of war, which are now smouldering, may burst into a blaze at any moment, and I do not wish that a momentary despair, whatever be its cause, should deprive the country forever of a defender who is, I am sure, as loyal as he is gallant."

Gabriel listened with a grave and wondering sadness to these kind words of hope and encouragement. He gazed in turn at each of the exalted personages who had addressed them to him, and appeared to be in very deep thought.

"Well," he at last replied, "this unexpected good-will which all of you, who ought perhaps to hate me, thus demonstrate, has changed my heart and my destiny. At your service, Sire, at yours, Madame and Monseigneur, so long as you live, I place the existence of which you have made me a gift, so to speak. I was not born a villain, and your kindness touches me deeply. I was born to be devoted to somebody, to sacrifice myself, and to serve as the instrument of noble ideas and great men, — sometimes a happy, but at others a fatal instrument, alas! as God, in His wrath, knows only too well! But let us speak no more of the gloomy past, since you are good enough to believe in the possibility of a future for me. That future, however, belongs not to me, but to you; and henceforth I cherish what you admire, and

think as you think. I abdicate my will. Let the beings and the objects in whom I believe, do with me as they please. My sword, my blood, my life, — all that I am, is theirs. I give my arm unreservedly and irrevocably to assist your genius, Monseigneur, as I devote my soul to religion."

He did not say which religion; but those who heard him were such devoted Catholics that no thought of the Reformed religion entered their minds.

The eloquent abnegation of the young count deeply touched them all. Mary had tears in her eyes; and the king congratulated himself on having been firm enough to rescue such a grateful heart. As for the Duc de Guise, he believed that he knew better than any one how far Gabriel's ardent self-sacrifice might go.

"Yes, my friend," said he, "I have need of you. I shall call upon you some day, in the name of France and the king, to draw the sword you promise us."

"It shall be ready, Monseigneur, — to-morrow, to-day, always!"

"Keep it in its scabbard for the present," said the duke. "As his Majesty has said, peace prevails at the moment, — there is a truce to war and faction. So rest on your sword awhile, Gabriel, and give this unfortunate notoriety which your name has attained of late time to die away. Surely, not a soul of those who are entitled to the name and possess the heart of a gentleman will ever dream of accusing you for your misfortune. But your real glory demands that this undesirable renown should sink into oblivion. Hereafter, say in a year or two, I will ask the king to bestow upon you again the office of captain of the Guards, of which you have never ceased to be worthy."

"Ah," said Gabriel, "it is not honors that I covet,

but opportunities to be useful to my king and country, opportunities to fight. I dare not say opportunities to die, for fear that I may seem ungrateful."

"Do not talk so, Gabriel," replied Le Balafré. "Just say that when the king shall call upon you for assistance against his foes, you will respond to the summons without delay."

"I will, Monseigneur, wherever I am, or may be required to go."

"It is well," said the Duc de Guise; "I ask no more than that of you."

"For my part," said François II., "I thank you for your promise, and you may rely upon me to see that you do not repent having redeemed it."

"While I," added Mary Stuart, "assure you that your devotion always will meet with equal confidence on our part, and that you shall be one of those friends from whom we have no secrets, and to whom we will refuse nothing."

The young count, more deeply touched than he chose to confess to himself, bowed, and touched respectfully with his lips the hand which the queen held out to him.

He then pressed the hand of the Duc de Guise, and receiving his dismissal by a kindly gesture from the king, withdrew, being thenceforth bound, by force of a generous action, to the son of the man upon whom he had sworn to be revenged even in the persons of his children.

Gabriel found Admiral de Coligny awaiting him when he reached home.

Aloyse had informed the admiral, who had come to pay a friendly visit to his companion-in-arms at St. Quentin, that her master had been summoned to the Louvre that morning; she had imparted her anxiety to

him, and O'Grady had determined to remain until the French officers should receive their orders.

He received General von Kottow's summons, and questioned him as to what had taken place.

Without giving him details, General merely said that upon the morning a complete explanation of the transaction with the honorable Count of Hesse II. he had been summoned personally and with the honor conferred.

"It would not have been otherwise," exclaimed the admiral, "for the whole nobility of France would have known sooner or later against any command which would have sent a traitor to the head of one of its warlike movements."

"Let us drop the subject," said General, with sorrowful constraint. "I am very glad to see you, Monsieur d'Armen. You know that I am already at heart a member of your sect, for I have told you and warned you so that often. Would you think that I would not bring down upon the fact in which I believe. I not only mean to, but I do now agree the fact in which I was brought up; your discourse and Master Paul's the books I have read and my own reflections, have completely convinced me, and I am with you heart and soul."

"Welcome, dear! and it comes very opportunely," said the admiral.

"I think, however," said General, "that even in the interest of the Religion itself, it might perhaps be better to keep my conversion secret for a time. As Monsieur de Grouse just observed, any sort of uncertainty is best avoided for the present. Besides, the delay will undoubt better with the new duties I have to perform."

"We shall always be proud to announce your name publicly as one of us," said the admiral.

"But my proper course is to decline, or at all events postpone, this priceless token of your esteem," Gabriel replied. "But I do wish to give you this pledge of my utter, immovable faith, and to be able to call myself in my own mind one of your brethren, both in purpose and in fact."

"This is glorious, indeed!" exclaimed Monsieur de Coligny. "All that I ask is your permission to inform the leaders of our party of the notable conquest which our ideas have definitively made."

"Oh, I consent to that with all my heart," said Gabriel.

"The Prince de Condé," continued the admiral, "La Renaudie, and Baron de Castelnau, already know you, and appreciate your merit fully."

"Alas! I much fear that they overestimate it; for, viewed in the most favorable light, my merit is very slight."

"No, no!" returned Coligny; "they do well to rely upon it. I know you well also. Besides," continued he, in a lower tone, "we may perhaps have an opportunity to put your new zeal to the proof very soon."

"Indeed?" said Gabriel, in surprise. "You know, Monsieur l'Amiral, that you can rely upon me,—nevertheless, with certain reservations, which I must make known to you."

"Who has not his reservations to make?" rejoined the admiral. "But listen, Gabriel: It was not only as a friend, but as a partisan as well, that I came to visit you to-day. We have spoken of you with the prince and La Renaudie. Even before your definite adhesion to our principles we looked upon you as an auxiliary of peculiar merit, and of impregnable honesty; in fact, we all agreed in regarding you as a man capable of serving us if you chose, but incapable of betraying us, whatever might happen."

"Indeed, I do possess that last qualification, in default of the former," Gabriel replied. "You may always rely upon my word, if not upon my assistance."

"Then we resolved to have no secrets from you," said the admiral. "You will be, like one of our leaders, made acquainted with all our plans, and you will be held to no responsibility except silence. You are not like other men; and exceptional measures must be taken with exceptional men. You will remain quite free, and we only shall be bound."

"Such confidence!" exclaimed Gabriel.

"Your engagement is left entirely to your own discretion, I repeat," said the admiral. "To begin with, let me tell you one fact: the schemes which were revealed to you in the Place Maubert, and which were then postponed, are practicable to-day. The weakness of the young king, the domineering arrogance of the Guises, the purpose of persecuting us which is no longer hidden, — all urge us to action; and we are about to act."

"Pardon me," Gabriel interrupted him; "I have already told you, Monsieur l'Amiral, that I can only give myself to your cause with certain limitations. Before you go any further with your confidences, I ought to tell you definitely that I do not mean to concern myself with the political aspects of the Reformation, — at least during the continuance of the present reign. I freely offer my fortune, my time, and my life to assist in the propagation of our principles and in extending our moral influence; but I have no right to view the movement except in its religious bearing, and in no sense as a party question. François II., Mary Stuart, as well as the Duc de Guise himself, have treated me very generously, — yes, nobly. I will not betray their confidence any more than yours. Allow me to refrain from action, and occupy myself only

with the principle for which we strive. Demand my testimony whenever you please; but I reserve the independence of my sword."

Monsieur de Coligny replied, after a moment's reflection, —

"My words, Gabriel, were not mere empty sounds. You are and shall still be quite free. Go on alone in your own path if you please; act independently of us or not at all. We shall never call you to account. We know," he added, with a significant expression, "that it is sometimes your way to prefer to dispense with associates or advisers."

"What do you mean?" asked Gabriel, in surprise.

"I know what I mean," replied the admiral. "For the present you ask that you may take no part in our conspiracies against the royal authority. So be it! Our duty will be done when we have given you notice of our movements and purposes. Then you may follow us or stand apart; that is your affair, and yours only. You will always know, either by letter or messenger, when and where we have need of you, and then you will act as seems good to you. If you come to us, you will always be welcome; if you stay away, no one will have any fault to find. Such is the agreement to which the leaders of the party have come concerning you, even before you had told me where you stood. You can accept such conditions, I should think."

"Indeed, I do accept them; and I thank you heartily," said Gabriel.

During the night which followed that eventful day, Gabriel, kneeling before his father's tomb in the mortuary vault of the counts of Montgommery, communed with his dead in these words: —

"Yes, my Father, I did indeed take oath not only to

punish your murderer in his own lifetime, but also to visit his sins upon his children after him. There is no doubt of it, O my Father, no doubt ! But I did not anticipate what has happened. Are there not obligations even more sacred than the fulfilment of an oath ? What duty can compel one to strike down an enemy who puts the sword in one's hand, and presents his bare breast to receive the blow ? If you were living, my Father, I am sure you would advise me to postpone my wrath, and not to meet confidence with treachery. Forgive me, then, from the grave, for doing what if you were living you would require me to do. Moreover, something seems to tell me that my vengeance is merely suspended, and that but for a short time. You know on high what we can only feel a presentiment of here below. But the pallor of this sickly king, and the frightful glance with which his mother threatened him, and the predictions (which have thus far proved accurate, and which decree that my own life must fall a prey to that woman's rancorous hatred), and the conspiracies already set on foot against the reign which began only yesterday, — all combine to lead me to think it probable that the boy of sixteen will occupy the throne for a much less time even than the man of forty, and that I shall very soon be able to resume my task and my oath of expiation, my Father, under the reign of another of the sons of Henri II."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

REPORTS AND DENUNCIATIONS.

SEVEN or eight months passed by, unmarked by any important occurrences either for the personages of this story, or for the actors upon the stage of history.

Nevertheless, during that time events of considerable importance were preparing.

To understand what they were, and learn all about them, we have only to pay a visit, on the 25th of February, 1560, to the place of all others where news is supposed to be most plentiful; that is to say, the cabinet of Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police, who was at that time one Monsieur de Braguelonne.

On the evening of the 25th of February, Monsieur de Braguelonne, lounging carelessly on his Cordova leather couch, was listening to the report of Master Arpion, one of his secretaries.

Master Arpion was reading aloud as follows, —

“To-day the notorious thief, Gilles Rose, was arrested in the great hall of the palace, in the act of cutting off the end of a golden girdle, on the person of a canon of Ste. Chapelle.”

“A canon of Ste. Chapelle! Well, upon my word!” exclaimed Monsieur de Braguelonne.

“It was a very sacrilegious performance,” observed Master Arpion.

“And very clever, too,” replied the lieutenant of police, “very clever! for your canon is a suspicious mor-

tal. I will tell you presently, Master Arpion, what must be done with this cunning thief. Go on."

"The demoiselles of the hovels in the Rue du Grand-Heuleu," continued Arpion, "are in a state of open revolt."

"For what cause, in God's name?"

"They claim to have addressed a petition directly to our lord the king, asking to be allowed to retain their establishments, and meanwhile they have had an encounter with the watch and put them to rout."

"That is very amusing!" laughed Monsieur de Braguelonne. "We can easily set that to rights. Poor girls! Is there anything else?"

Master Arpion continued, —

"Messieurs les Deputés de la Sorbonne having presented themselves at Madame la Princesse de Condé's house at Paris, to insist that she should not eat flesh during Lent, were received with jeers and derision by Monsieur de Sechelles, who said to them, among other insulting things, that he liked them less than a boil on his nose, and that such calves as they made strange ambassadors."

"Ah, that is a serious matter!" said the lieutenant, rising. "Refusing to abstain from meat, and poking fun at Messieurs de la Sorbonne! This tends to swell your account, Madame de Condé; and when we present you with the total — Arpion, is that all?"

"*Mon Dieu*, yes! for to-day. Monseigneur has not told me what to do with this Gilles Rose."

"In the first place," said Monsieur de Braguelonne, "you will take him, together with the most adroit pick-pockets and burglars you can find in the prison, and send the whole lot of fine fellows to Blois, where they can have an opportunity to exhibit their tricks and cleverness

for the king's entertainment during the fêtes which are being arranged for his Majesty."

"But, Monseigneur, suppose they retain the articles they have stolen in fun?"

"Then they shall be hung."

At this moment an usher entered and announced, —

"Monsieur le Inquisiteur de la Foi!"

Master Arpion did not need to be told to withdraw. He bowed respectfully and left the room.

The man who was ushered in was, in fact, a notable and formidable personage.

To his every-day titles of Doctor of the Sorbonne and Canon of Noyon, he added the extraordinary and high-sounding appellation of 'Grand Inquisitor of the Faith in France.' And in order that he might bear a name as sonorous as his title, he called himself Démocharès, although he was really plain Antoine de Mouchy. The people had christened his subordinates *mouchards*, — police spies.

"Good-evening, Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police," said the grand inquisitor.

"The same to you, Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur," responded the lieutenant.

"Any news in Paris?"

"I was just about to ask you that very question."

"That means that there is none," observed Démocharès, with a profound sigh. "Ah, these are hard times! There is nothing going on, — no conspiracies, and no crime at all! What cowardly wretches these Huguenots are! Our profession has a decided grievance against them, Monsieur de Braguelonne!"

"No, no!" replied Monsieur de Braguelonne, emphatically. "No, governments change, but the police remains."

"Nevertheless," retorted Monsieur de Mouchy, bitterly, "see what the result has been of our descent upon the main army of the Reformers in the Rue des Marais. By surprising them at table in the midst of their dinner, we hoped to take them in the act of eating pork in the guise of the paschal lamb, as you had told us; but the only result of that magnificent expedition was one poor little larded chicken. Can such exploits as that reflect much credit upon your organization, Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police?"

"One can't always succeed," said Monsieur de Braguelonne. "Were you any more fortunate yourself, in the matter of the advocate of Place Maubert, — Trouillard, was it not? Yet you expected great things of it."

"I admit it," said Démocharès, piteously.

"You expected to prove as clearly as the day," continued Monsieur de Braguelonne, "that this Trouillard had abandoned his two daughters to the tender mercies of his fellow-enthusiasts after a frightful orgy; but, behold! the witnesses whom you had bought at such a high price suddenly retracted everything and gave you the lie."

"The traitors!" muttered De Mouchy.

"More than that," said the lieutenant, pitilessly pursuing his advantage, "I received reports from various sources, all of which went to show that the virtue of the two young girls was without a stain."

"It was infamous," grumbled Démocharès.

"A bad failure, Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur de la Foi, a bad failure!" repeated Monsieur de Braguelonne, with much complacency.

"Well," cried Démocharès, impatiently, "if the affair did miscarry, it was all your fault!"

"What, my fault!" ejaculated the amazed lieutenant.

"To be sure. You content yourself with reports and retractations, and such nonsense. Of what consequence are these repulses and contradictions? We must go ahead all the same, and boldly accuse the villains as if we had met no rebuff at all."

"What! without proofs?"

"Yes, and convict them."

"When they have committed no crime?"

"Yes, and hang them."

"Without judges?"

"Yes, a hundred times yes! Without judge or crime or proof! There's no great merit in hanging only those who are really guilty."

"But what an outcry of rage there will be against us then!" said Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"Ah! that is what I expected you would say," rejoined Démocharès, triumphantly. "That is the very corner-stone of my whole system, Monsieur. For what does this rage of which you speak lead to? Conspiracy. What is the outcome of conspiracy? Revolution. And what is the principal result of revolution? Why, to make your office and mine of very great importance and utility."

"To be sure, from that point of view!" said Monsieur de Braguelonne, laughing.

"Ah, Monsieur," observed Démocharès, with the air of a master, "remember this principle, 'In order to reap crimes we must first sow them.' Persecution is a very great force."

"Well, I must say," rejoined the lieutenant, "that it seems to me we have not been behindhand in that direction since the beginning of this reign. It would be difficult to stir up and provoke the discontented of all sorts more than we have done."

"Pshaw! what have we done?" asked the grand inquisitor, scornfully.

"Well, in the first place, do you consider the daily domiciliary visits and despoiling of all the Huguenots, innocent or guilty, of no account?"

"My faith! yes, I consider them of absolutely no account," was Démocharès's reply; "for you see with what tranquil patience they bear these annoyances, which are altogether too trifling."

"And the punishment of Anne Dubourg, nephew of a chancellor of France, who was burned two months since in the Place de Grève, — was that nothing?"

"It was a very small thing," said the fastidious De Mouchy. "What was the result of it? The murder of President Minard, one of his judges, and an apocryphal conspiracy of which we never succeeded in finding any traces. So that was nothing to make a very great amount of talk about."

"Well, what do you say to the last edict?" asked Monsieur de Braguelonne, — "the last edict, which strikes, not at the Huguenots alone, but at the whole nobility of the kingdom. For my own part, I said frankly to Monsieur le Cardinal de Lorraine that I thought it went a little too far."

"Are you speaking of the ordinance suppressing pensions?" said Démocharès.

"No, indeed, but of the one which requires all suitors, whether of high or low birth, to quit the court within twenty-four hours, under pain of being hanged. You must agree that to decree the halter for gentlemen and clowns alike is rather severe, and likely to lead to trouble."

"Yes, the order does not lack audacity," said Démocharès, with a smile of satisfaction. "Fifty years

ago such an edict would, I confess, have excited the whole nobility to revolt. But now you see they only complain, and do nothing overt. Not one of them has raised a hand."

"That's where you are mistaken, Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur," said Braguelonne, lowering his voice; "and though they may not be stirring at Paris, there is trouble brewing in the Provinces."

"Aha!" cried De Mouchy, eagerly, "you have some intelligence of that sort?"

"Not yet, but I expect it every moment."

"From what quarter?"

"From the Loire."

"Have you agents there?"

"Only one, but he is a good one."

"Only one? that's very risky," remarked Démocharès, with a very knowing air.

"I much prefer, myself," replied Monsieur de Braguelonne, "to pay a single trustworthy man, who is at once intelligent and reliable, the price of twenty stupid rascals. That is my way; what do you think?"

"Oh, that's all very well; but who is responsible to you for this man?"

"Well, his head in the first place; and then his past services, too, for he has been put to the proof."

"Never mind; it's very risky," persisted Démocharès.

Master Arpion came softly in while Monsieur de Mouchy was speaking, and whispered in his master's ear.

"Aha!" cried the lieutenant, triumphantly. "Very well! Arpion, introduce Lignières at once. Yes, while Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur is here; for is he not one of us?"

Arpion saluted and withdrew.

"This Lignières is the very man of whom I was speaking to you," continued Monsieur de Braguelonne, rubbing his hands. "You shall hear what he says. He has just arrived from Nantes. We have no secrets from each other, have we?—and I am very glad to have an opportunity to prove to you that my way is as good as another."

At this point Master Arpion opened the door to Lignières.

It was the selfsame little fellow, lean and hungry-looking, whose acquaintance we have already made at the Protestant meeting in the Place Maubert, — the same who had so boldly exhibited the republican medal, and prated about decapitated lilies and crowns trodden under foot.

Thus we may see that even if the name of instigating agent (*agent provocateur*) had not come into use at that time, the article itself was in a flourishing condition.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A SPY.

LIGNIÈRES, as he entered the room, cast a look of cold distrust upon Démocharès, and after he had saluted Monsieur de Braguelonne, remained cautiously silent and motionless, waiting to be questioned.

"I am delighted to see you, Monsieur Lignières," was Monsieur de Braguelonne's greeting. "You may speak with perfect freedom before Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur de la Foi en France."

"Oh, to be sure!" Lignières made haste to exclaim; "and if I had had any idea that I was in the presence of the illustrious Démocharès, pray believe, Monseigneur, that I should not have hesitated as I have."

"Very well!" said De Mouchy, nodding his head approvingly, and evidently much flattered by the spy's respectful deference.

"Come, speak, Monsieur Lignières! — waste no time," said the lieutenant of police.

"But it may be," suggested Lignières, "that Monsieur is not thoroughly conversant with what took place at the last meeting but one held by the Protestants at La Ferté?"

"In fact, I know very little about it," replied Démocharès.

"Then if I may," added Lignières, "I will briefly recount the serious facts which I have gathered recently;

that course will be better, and make what comes after more readily understood."

Monsieur de Braguelonne gave the signal of assent, for which Lignières was waiting. This little delay was doubtless annoying to the impatient lieutenant; but it also flattered his pride by affording an opportunity of showing off to the grand inquisitor the superior capacity and extraordinary eloquence of the agent he had chosen.

It is certain that Démocharès was not only surprised, but that he felt the delight of a skilful connoisseur who recognizes a more unexceptionable and perfect instrument than he has himself previously possessed.

Lignières, much excited by this appreciation in such a high quarter, tried to show himself worthy of it, and his performance was really very fine.

"That first assemblage at La Ferté was really not of very much importance," he began. "There was nothing done or said that was not very insipid; and it was to no purpose that I proposed overthrowing his Majesty, and establishing in France a constitution like that in vogue among the Swiss cantons; my suggestions found no echo but insulting remarks. It was only provisionally determined to present a petition to the king, praying that there might be an end to the persecutions of the Reformers, and that the Guises should be dismissed, a ministry formed, headed by the princes of the blood, and the States-General be convoked forthwith. Simply a petition!—a very meagre result that. However, they made an accurate computation of their numbers and effected an organization; that is something tangible. Then the matter of choosing leaders came up. So long as it was only a question of the subordinate leaders in the different districts there was no trouble; but the

commander-in-chief, the head and front of the conspiracy, — that is where the difficulty began. Monsieur de Coligny and the Prince de Condé declined through their respective mouthpieces the dangerous honor which it was proposed to confer upon one or the other of them. It would be much better, so we were told in their behalf, to select some Huguenot who occupied a less lofty position, so that the movement might bear a more unmistakable stamp of its popular character, — a fine excuse for the simpletons! However, they were content with it; and after much debate they finally elected Godefroid de Barry, Seigneur de la Renaudie."

"La Renaudie!" Démocharès repeated the name. "Yes, he is in fact one of the ardent ringleaders of these scoundrels. I know him to be an energetic and resolute man."

"You will soon know him for a Catiline!" said Lignières.

"Oh, ho!" said the lieutenant of police; "I think that is going a little too far."

"You will see," returned the spy, — "you will see if I am going too far! I come now to *our* second convocation, which met at Nantes the 5th of this month of February."

"Aha!" cried Démocharès and Braguelonne together.

Both moved closer to Master Lignières, with eager curiosity.

"That was the time," said Lignières, bursting with importance, "when they no longer confined themselves to mere talk. Listen! Shall I give your Lordships at length all the details and the proofs, or shall I hasten at once to the results?" added the villain, as if he wished to continue to hold their two hearts dependent on his words as long as possible.

"Give us the facts — the facts!" cried the lieutenant, impatiently.

"Very well, then, and you will shudder when you hear them. After some unimportant preliminary speech-making, La Renaudie took the floor; and this, in substance, is what he said: 'Last year, when the Queen of Scotland desired to try the ministers at Stirling, all their parishioners determined to follow them to that place; and although they were unarmed, this extensive movement was quite sufficient to frighten the regent and induce her to forego the violent measures she had meditated. I propose that here in France we begin in like manner, — that a great multitude of those of our belief should make their way to Blois, where the king is living for the moment, and should present themselves without arms before his Majesty, and hand him a petition wherein he will be implored to recall the edicts of persecution, and allow the Reformers the free exercise of their religion; and since their secret meetings in the night-time have been falsely slandered, he will be asked to permit them to assemble in their places of worship under the eyes of the constituted authorities.'"

"Well, well, always the same thing!" Démocharès interrupted, in a tone of disappointment. "Peaceful and respectful demonstrations, which amount to nothing! Petitions! protests! supplications! Is this the awe-inspiring news you had to give us, Master Lignières?"

"Oh, wait, — just wait!" replied Lignières. "You can understand that I cried down this innocent proposition of La Renaudie's just as you do, — nay, even more than you. To what, I asked, had such purposeless steps led before, or to what could they be expected to lead? Others of the Protestants spoke in the same strain. Thereupon La Renaudie, with much satisfaction, dis-

closed the true inwardness of his heart, and betrayed the audacious scheme which lay hidden beneath his innocent words."

"Let us hear this audacious scheme," said Démocharès, with the air of a man not easily to be astonished.

"It is well worth the trouble of frustrating, I think," continued Lignières. "While men's minds are occupied with the mob of timid, unarmed petitioners, who approach the throne as suppliants, five hundred horsemen and a thousand foot, — you understand, Messieurs, fifteen hundred men, — selected from among the noblemen who are most determined and most devoted to the Reformation and to the princes, are to come together from the various provinces, under thirty chosen leaders, to advance quietly upon Blois by different roads, enter the town, with or without force, — with or without force, I say, — carry off the king, the queen-mother, and Monsieur de Guise, and bring them to trial, and fill their places with the princes of the blood, leaving it for the States-General to decide upon the form of government which shall finally be adopted. There, Messieurs, is the plot. What do you say to it? Is it a childish one? Should it be passed by without being noticed? In short, am I good for nothing, or am I useful to some extent?"

He came to an end with an expression of triumph. The grand inquisitor and the lieutenant exchanged glances of surprise, not unmixed with alarm. There was a long pause, during which their minds were busy with reflections of various descriptions.

"By the Mass, but this is admirable, I declare!" cried Démocharès, at last.

"Say rather that it is terrible," observed Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"We shall see; we shall see!" continued the grand inquisitor, shaking his head very knowingly.

"Why," said Monsieur de Braguelonne, "we only know the schemes which this La Renaudie avows; but it is very easy to guess that nothing will come of them; that Messieurs de Guise will be on their guard; that they will all be cut in pieces; and that if his Majesty intrusts the power to the Prince de Condé, it will only be by force."

"But we are forewarned!" returned Démocharès. "All that these poor fools mean to do against us will turn against themselves, and they will fall into their own trap. I promise you that Monsieur le Cardinal will be delighted, and would have paid a high price for such an opportunity of making an end of his enemies."

"God grant that he may continue to be delighted to the end!" said Monsieur de Braguelonne.

Addressing Lignières, who had now become a man to be treated well, an invaluable ally, and of great consequence, he said, —

"As for you, Monsieur le Marquis" (the rascal was really a marquis), "you have rendered a most valuable service to his Majesty and to the State. You shall be worthily rewarded for it, never fear!"

"Yes, my word for it!" added Démocharès; "you deserve a handsome reward, Monsieur, and you possess all my esteem! To you, also, Monsieur de Braguelonne, my sincere congratulations upon your choice of agents. Ah, Monsieur de Lignières has a claim to my highest consideration, in truth!"

"That is a very generous recompense for what little I have been able to do," said Lignières, bowing modestly.

"You know that we are not ungrateful, Monsieur de Lignières," continued the lieutenant. "But come, you

have not told us everything, have you? Did they fix a time, or a place of rendezvous?"

"They are to meet in the neighborhood of Blois on the 15th of March," replied Lignières.

"The 15th of March! Well, well!" exclaimed Monsieur de Braguelonne. "We have only twenty days before us, and Monsieur le Cardinal de Lorraine is at Blois! It will take about two days to notify him and receive his orders. What a responsibility!"

"But what a triumph at the end!" said Démocharès.

"Have you the names of the leaders, dear Monsieur de Lignières?" asked the lieutenant.

"Yes, I have them written down," was the reply.

"What a jewel of a man!" exclaimed Démocharès, admiringly. "He helps to reconcile me to human nature."

Lignières unbuttoned an inner pocket in his doublet, and drew from it a scrap of paper, and having unfolded it, he read aloud as follows:—

"List of the leaders, with the names of the provinces which they respectively command:—

"Castelnau de Chalosses, — Gascogne.

"Mazères, — Béarn.

"Du Mesnil, — Périgord.

"Maillé de Brézé, — Poitou.

"La Chesnaye, — Maine.

"Sainte-Marie, — Normandie.

"Cocqueville, — Picardie.

"De Ferrières-Maligny, — Île de France and Champagne.

"Châteauvieux, — Provence, etc.

"You can read that list and make your comments upon it at your leisure, Monsieur," said Lignières, handing the treacherous paper to the lieutenant.

"This is nought but organized civil war!" exclaimed Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"Take notice too," added Lignières, "that while these detachments are making their way toward Blois, other leaders in each province are to hold themselves in readiness to put down any movement that may be attempted in behalf of Messieurs de Guise."

"Good! We will have them all as in a great net!" said Démocharès, rubbing his hands. "Why, you seem overwhelmed, Monsieur de Braguelonne! After the first feeling of surprise, I declare that, for my own part, I should be very sorry if all this had not taken place."

"But just see how little time we have left!" observed the lieutenant. "In truth, my good Lignières, while I would not for the world reproach, I must say that since the 5th of February you have had time enough to notify me."

"How could I?" asked Lignières. "I was intrusted by La Renaudie with more than twenty commissions between Nantes and Paris. And not only have I succeeded in gleaned some valuable information, but to have neglected or postponed his commissions would have been to arouse suspicion, while to write you a letter or send a messenger would have been to compromise our secrets."

"Very true," said Monsieur de Braguelonne, "you are always right. Let us say no more about what is done, but consider what there remains to do. You have told us nothing of the Prince de Condé. Was he not with you at Nantes?"

"He was there," Lignières replied. "But before taking any decided step he wished to consult Chaudieu and the English ambassador, and so he said that he would accompany La Renaudie to Paris for that purpose."

"Is he coming to Paris, then? And is La Renaudie also coming?"

"Better than that; they ought both to be here ere this," said Lignières.

"And where do they lodge?" asked Monsieur de Braguelonne, eagerly.

"That I can't tell you. I took pains to ask, in a careless way, where I might find our leader if I had any communication to make; but they only gave me an indirect channel of correspondence. La Renaudie probably does not wish to compromise the prince."

"That is a great pity, I must admit," reflected the lieutenant. "We shall have difficulty in finding traces of them."

At this moment Master Arpion entered once more with his soft and mysterious tread.

"Well, what is it, Arpion?" asked Monsieur de Braguelonne, sharply. "You knew very well that we were engaged with important business, and why the devil do you interrupt us?"

"I should not have ventured to enter unless for something of equal importance," replied Arpion.

"Well, what is it? Tell me quickly, and aloud; for we are all friends here."

"A man named Pierre des Avenelles —" began Arpion.

De Braguelonne, Démocharès, and Lignières exclaimed simultaneously, —

"Pierre des Avenelles!"

"That's the advocate of the Rue des Marmousets, who ordinarily entertains the Protestants at Paris," said Démocharès.

"And upon whose house I have long had my eye," added De Braguelonne. "But the good man is very

sly and careful, and has always eluded my surveillance. What does he want, Arpion?"

"To speak with Monseigneur at once," replied the secretary. "He seems to me to be in a state of great alarm."

"He cannot know anything," said Lignières, quickly and jealously. "Besides," he added, with lofty scorn, "he is an honest man."

"We shall see; we shall see!" observed the grand inquisitor. (That was his favorite expression.)

"Arpion," Monsieur de Braguelonne said to the secretary, "show this man in immediately."

"I will, Monseigneur," said Arpion, leaving the room.

"Pardon me, my dear Marquis," continued De Braguelonne, addressing Lignières, "this Des Avenelles knows you, and the unexpected sight of you might disturb him. And then, too, neither you nor I would care to have him know you were one of us. Be good enough to step into Arpion's closet while this interview is in progress; it is there at the end of the passage. I will recall you as soon as we have done with him. You might remain, if you will, Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur, for your imposing presence cannot fail to be useful."

"Very well; I will remain to please you," said Démocharès, well content.

"And I will withdraw," said Lignières; "but remember what I say, Monsieur le Lieutenant. You will not learn anything of importance from this fellow Des Avenelles. A poor fool! A timid but upright soul! But of no particular account, — of no account at all."

"We will do the best we can. But go, go, my dear Lignières! here is our man."

In fact, Lignières had but just time to make his escape when a man entered, pale and trembling with nervous

excitement, escorted, indeed, almost carried, by Master Arpion.

It was Pierre des Avenelles, the advocate, whom we first met with Sieur Lignières, at the meeting in the Place Maubert, where he made the success of the evening, if our readers remember, with his courageously timid speech.

CHAPTER XL.

AN INFORMER.

ON the occasion of this, our second meeting with Pierre des Avenelles, he was all timidity, and had lost his courage.

After bowing to the floor before Démocharès and De Braguelonne, he began in a faltering voice, —

“I am, I presume, in the presence of Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police?”

“And of Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur de la Foi,” added De Braguelonne, waving his hand toward De Mouchy.

“Oh, Holy Virgin!” cried poor Des Avenelles, turning still paler if that were possible. “Messeigneurs, you see, being a very great culprit, — alas! one who has been too guilty, — may I hope for mercy? I know not. Can my sincere wish to atone for my sins help me to lighten their punishment? It is for your clemency to reply.”

Monsieur de Braguelonne saw at once with what manner of man he had to do.

“To confess is not sufficient,” he said harshly; “there must be reparation as well.”

“Oh, there shall be, Monseigneur, if I can accomplish it!” returned Des Avenelles.

“Very well; but in order to accomplish it,” continued the lieutenant, “you must have it in your power to be of some service to us, or to give us some valuable information.”

"I will try to do so," said the advocate, almost choked with terror.

"It will be very difficult," retorted De Braguelonne, carelessly, "for we already know all there is to know."

"What! you know —"

"Everything, I tell you; and in this pass to which you have brought yourself your tardy repentance will hardly avail to save your head, I promise you."

"My head! Oh, Heaven! My head in danger? Yet I have come —"

"Too late," said the inflexible De Braguelonne. "You cannot now be of any use to us, and we know in advance everything that you can tell us."

"Perhaps not," said Des Avenelles. "Excuse my question, but what do you know?"

"In the first place, that you are one of these damned heretics," interposed Démocharès, in a voice of thunder.

"Alas, alas! that is only too true!" replied Des Avenelles. "Yes, I am of the Religion, — why, I'm sure I have no idea; but I will abjure it, Monseigneur, if you will only spare my life. The meeting-house is surrounded by too many perils, and I will go back to Mass."

"That is not all," said Démocharès; "you are in the habit of entertaining Huguenots at your house."

"No one has ever been able to find one in any of their visitations," returned the advocate, eagerly.

"Very true," said Monsieur de Braguelonne; "for you probably have some secret exit from your house, — some hidden passage, some as yet unknown means of communication with the outer world. But one of these days we will not leave one stone of your house standing on another, and it will be forced to yield us its secret."

"I will give it up to you myself," said the advocate; "for I admit, Monseigneur, that I have at times furnished

board and lodging to those of the Religion. They pay well; and my profession is so unremunerative! One must live! But it shall never happen again; and if my abjuration is accepted, no Huguenot will ever dare to knock at my door again."

"You have also spoken frequently at the Protestant meetings," continued Démocharès.

"I am an advocate," whined Des Avenelles. "Besides, I have always spoken in favor of moderate measures. You ought to know that, since you know everything."

Summoning courage to raise his eyes to these two forbidding personages, Des Avenelles went on, —

"But, asking your pardon, it seems to me that you do not know everything; for you speak only about me, and have nothing to say about the affairs of the party in general, which are in truth of vast moment. Therefore I am glad to see that there are many things of which you still know nothing."

"That is just where you are mistaken," retorted the lieutenant; "and we will prove it to you."

Démocharès motioned him to be careful.

"I understand you, Monsieur le Grand Inquisiteur," said he; "but there can be no imprudence in showing our hand to Monsieur, for Monsieur will not leave this place for a long time to come."

"What! not leave here for a long time?" cried Pierre des Avenelles, in affright.

"No, certainly not," coolly remarked Monsieur de Braguelonne. "Do you imagine, pray, that under color of coming here to make revelations, you will be allowed at your ease to observe our position, and assure yourself as to the extent of our information, and then go and report everything to your accomplices? That won't do,

my dear Monsieur ; and you are our prisoner from this moment."

"Prisoner !" Des Avenelles repeated the word as if overwhelmed at the thought ; but upon reflection he adopted a different tone. Our man, we remember, had the courage of cowardice in the highest degree.

"Oh, well, — in fact, I much prefer it so !" he cried. "I am much safer here with you than I should be at home, in the midst of all their plot-hatching. And since you have determined to keep me here, Monsieur le Lieutenant, you will have no scruples now about consenting to reply to some of my respectful questions. In my humble opinion, you are not so thoroughly well informed as you believe ; and I think I may find some way of proving my good faith and my loyalty by some valuable revelation."

"Hum ! I much doubt it," replied Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"In the first place, what do you know about the latest meetings of the Huguenots, Monseigneur ?" asked the advocate.

"Do you mean the one held at Nantes ?" said the lieutenant.

"Ah ! do you know that ? Very well ! Yes, the one held at Nantes. What took place there ?"

"Do you refer to the conspiracy that was formed there ?" rejoined Monsieur de Braguelonne, slyly.

"Alas, yes ! I see that I can tell you nothing of consequence on that subject," replied Des Avenelles. "That conspiracy —"

"Has for its object to carry off the king from Blois, substitute the princes for Messieurs de Guise by force, convoke the States-General, etc. All this is ancient history, my dear Monsieur des Avenelles, for it happened way back on the 5th of February."

"And the conspirators who feel so sure of their secret!" exclaimed the advocate. "They are lost, and myself with them; for doubtless you know the leaders of the conspiracy?"

"The secret leaders as well as the avowed ones. The former are the Prince de Condé and the admiral; while the avowed leaders are La Renaudie, Castelnau, Mazères — But it would take too long to enumerate them all. See, here is a list of their names, and of the provinces as well which they are respectively expected to incite to rebellion."

"Great God of mercy! How skilful are the police, and what fools the conspirators!" cried Des Avenelles. "Is there not, then, the least little word which I can tell you, which you do not already know? The Prince de Condé and La Renaudie, for instance, — do you know where they are?"

"Together in Paris."

"Why, this is frightful! And there is nothing left for me to do but to commend my soul to God! Yet, stay! — one word more, in pity's name! Whereabouts in Paris are they?"

Monsieur de Braguelonne did not immediately reply, but with his clear and piercing glance seemed to be reading Des Avenelles's soul and his eyes to their lowest depths.

The latter, with labored breath, repeated his question, — "Do you know in what part of Paris the Prince de Condé and La Renaudie now are, Monseigneur?"

"We shall have no difficulty in finding them," replied Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"But you haven't found them yet!" cried Des Avenelles, with delight. "Ah! God be praised! I

may still win my pardon. *I* know where they are, Monseigneur."

Démocharès's eye glistened; but the lieutenant of police concealed his satisfaction.

"Pray, where are they?" he said in the most indifferent tone imaginable.

"At my house, Messieurs, at my house!" said the advocate, proudly.

"I knew it," calmly replied Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"What do you say, — you knew that, too?" ejaculated Des Avenelles, whose cheeks lost their color again.

"To be sure I did; but I wished to test your good faith. Come, it is all right, and I am content with you! Your case was a very serious one, to say the least. To think of having sheltered such great villains!"

"You made yourself quite as guilty as they," said Démocharès, sententiously.

"Oh, don't say so, Monseigneur!" rejoined Des Avenelles. "I feared I was incurring great risks, and I have hardly dared to breathe since I have known the horrible plans of my two guests. But I have known them only three days, — only three days, I solemnly swear! You should know that I was not present at the Nantes gathering. When the Prince de Condé and the Seigneur de la Renaudie arrived at my house in the early part of this week, I believed myself to be harboring adherents of the Reformed religion, but not conspirators. I have a holy horror of conspirators and conspiracies! They said nothing to me on the subject at first; and it is that for which I am angry with them. Thus to expose to deadly peril, without his knowledge, a poor fellow who had never done them aught but good turns, — that was very wrong. But these great personages never do otherwise."

"What's that?" was Monsieur de Braguelonne's sharp retort,—for he considered himself a very great man indeed.

"I refer to the great personages of the Reformed religion," the advocate made haste to explain. "However, they began by keeping everything from me; but they were whispering together all day long, and writing day and night; visits they received every minute. I watched and listened; in short, I guessed at the beginning of the plot, so that they were obliged to tell me everything,—their meeting at Nantes, their great conspiracy; in fact, all this that you know, and which they thought so carefully concealed. But since that revelation I have not been able to sleep or eat; I have just existed. Every time that anybody came to my house—and God knows how often people have come there!—I would imagine that they had come to carry me before the judges. During the night, in my rare moments of feverish sleep, I dreamed of nothing but courts and scaffolds and executioners, and I would awake bathed in a cold perspiration, to begin again my unceasing attempts to foresee and estimate the risk I was running."

"The risk you were running, did you say?" said Monsieur de Braguelonne. "Why, prison in the first place—"

"And torture in the second," added Démocharès.

"To be followed probably by hanging," said the lieutenant.

"Or the stake, possibly," continued the grand inquisitor.

"The wheel has been known to be used in such cases," the lieutenant put in, as a suitably effective end to the list.

"Imprisoned! tortured! hanged! burned alive! broken on the wheel!" Poor Des Avenelles repeated every word

as if he had actually undergone each of the punishments they enumerated.

"*Dame !* You are an advocate, and should know the law," retorted Monsieur de Braguelonne.

"Indeed, I know it only too well !" cried Des Avenelles. "Therefore, after three days of mortal anguish, I could restrain myself no longer : I felt that such a secret was too heavy a burden for my responsibility, and I came to deposit it in your hands, Monsieur le Lieutenant de Police."

"That was the safest course to pursue," replied Monsieur de Braguelonne ; "and although, as you see, your revelation is of no great service to us, still we will take your good intentions into consideration."

He talked for some moments in a low tone with De Mouchy, who seemed to be urging him, not without much resistance, to adopt a certain course of action.

"Before everything, I beg you, for mercy's sake," said Des Avenelles, imploringly, "not to betray my defection to my former — accomplices ; for, alas ! they who murdered President Minard might well do me an ill turn also."

"We will keep your secret," replied the lieutenant of police.

"But you propose to keep me a prisoner, do you not ?" said Des Avenelles, with a very humbled and frightened air.

"No ; you may return freely to your own house at any moment," replied De Braguelonne.

"Do you mean it ?" said the advocate. "Ah ! I see you propose to arrest my guests ?"

"Not your guests, either. They will remain as free as yourself."

"How is that ?" asked Des Avenelles, in amazement.

"Just listen to me a moment," replied Monsieur de Braguelonne, in an authoritative tone, "and pay good heed to my words. You will return at once to your own house, lest a too long absence should arouse suspicion. You will say not a word more to your guests, either as to your own fears or their secrets. You will act, and leave them to act, as if you had not been in this room to-day. Do you understand me? Hinder nothing, and express surprise at nothing. Let things take their course."

"That is easily done," said Des Avenelles.

"However," added Monsieur de Braguelonne, "if we need any information, we will either send to you for it or summon you hither, and you will hold yourself always in readiness to serve us in either way. If a descent upon your house is judged necessary, you will lend a hand in making it effective."

"Since I have done so much merely to make a beginning, I will go through with it," said Des Avenelles, with a sigh.

"Very well. One word in conclusion. If matters progress in a way to prove that you have obeyed these very simple instructions, you shall have your pardon; but if we have reason to suspect that you have been in the least degree indiscreet, you will be the first to be punished, and will suffer worse than all the others."

"You shall be burned alive, by our Lady!" chimed in Démocharès, in his deep and gloomy voice.

"However —" began the trembling advocate.

"That is sufficient," said De Braguelonne. "You have heard; see that you remember. *Au revoir.*"

He made an imperious motion with his hand. The too prudent advocate left the room, relieved and anxious at the same time.

After his departure, for a moment nothing was said by the two others.

"You wished it so, and I yielded," said the lieutenant, finally; "but I confess that I have serious doubts as to the wisdom of that mode of procedure."

"No, everything is as well as can be," replied Démocharès. "This business must be allowed to take its own course, and with that in view, the important point was not to give the alarm to the conspirators. Let them think themselves sure of their secret, and go ahead in their false security. They fancy that they are marching in darkness, while we are following all their movements in the broad daylight. It is superb! Such another occasion to strike a deadly blow at the root of the heresy will not present itself in twenty years. Besides, I know the ideas of his Eminence the Cardinal de Lorraine upon this matter."

"Better than I do, to be sure," said De Braguelonne. "What are we to do now?"

"You will remain at Paris," said Démocharès, "and with the assistance of Lignières and Des Avenelles, keep a strict watch upon the two leading conspirators. I shall set out in an hour for Blois, to warn Messieurs de Guise. The cardinal will be somewhat alarmed at first, but Le Balafre is with him to encourage him; and when he comes to think it over, he will be in an ecstasy of delight. It is for those two to assemble in a fortnight around the king, without disturbance, all the forces they have available. Meanwhile, our Huguenots will have nothing to startle them; they will fall in a body, or one by one, into the trap we have laid, the blind fools, and they will be at our mercy. We shall have them, and then, — 'General slaughter!'"

The grand inquisitor stalked up and down the room rubbing his hands for joy.

"May God grant," said Monsieur de Braguelonne, "that

no unforeseen event shall reduce this splendid scheme to nought!"

"Impossible!" Démocharès made haste to say. "General slaughter! We have them on the hip! Call Lignières back, if you will, so that he may finish with the information he has for us, which I am to report to the Cardinal de Lorraine. But I look upon the heresy as already extinct. General slaughter!"

CHAPTER XLI.

A CHILD KING AND QUEEN.

IF in imagination we go forward two days, and traverse forty leagues of space, we may fancy ourselves on the 27th of February at the splendid Château de Blois, where the court was temporarily established.

There had been a great celebration at the château the day before, with jousting and ballets and allegorical representations, all under the direction of Monsieur Antoine de Baif the poet.

So that on the morning in question the young king and his queen, for whose entertainment the fête had been given, had risen rather later than usual, and not fully rested from the fatigue of their holiday-making.

Fortunately no reception was appointed for that day, so that they were at liberty to amuse themselves by chatting over at their leisure the things that had pleased their fancy.

"For my own part," said Mary Stuart, "I thought all the entertainments the finest and rarest things imaginable."

"Yes," replied François, "especially the ballets and the scenes that were acted. But I must confess that the sonnets and madrigals seemed to me a trifle tiresome."

"What!" cried Mary; "why, they were very bright and clever, I assure you."

"But too everlastingly eulogistic, you must agree, *mignonne*. You see, it's not especially amusing to hear

one's self praised thus by the hour ; and I could not help fancying last evening that the good God Himself must sometimes have His moments of being bored in His Paradise. Then you must remember, too, that these gentlemen, especially Messieurs de Baif and de Maisonneuve, have a way of interlarding their discourse with numbers of Latin words, which I do not always understand."

"But that has a very learned air," said Mary, "and it is a fashion which makes me feel very literary and of very correct taste."

"Ah, Mary, you know so much yourself!" replied the young king, smiling. "You can make verses, and you understand Latin, too, while I have never succeeded in making any headway in it."

"But study is our lot, and the only amusement we women have, just as you men and princes are born to action and command."

"Nevertheless," rejoined François, "just for the sake of equalling you in one thing, I would like to know as much as my brother Charles."

"Apropos of our brother Charles," Mary interrupted, "did you notice him yesterday in the part he assumed in the allegory of 'Religion defended by the Three Divine Virtues'?"

"Yes," said the king ; "he was one of the horsemen who represented the virtues, — Charity, I think."

"The very same," replied Mary. "Well, did you see, Sire, with what fury he belabored the head of poor Heresy?"

"Yes, indeed, when she came forward in the midst of the flames with the body of a serpent. Charles seemed to be quite beside himself, really."

"And, tell me, gentle Sire," continued the queen,

"did not that head of Heresy seem to you to resemble some one?"

"Why, yes," said François, "I thought I must be mistaken; but it assuredly wore the expression of Monsieur de Coligny, did it not?"

"Say, rather, that it was Monsieur l'Amiral, feature for feature."

"And all those devils who carried him off!" said the king.

"And the joy of our uncle the cardinal!"

"And my mother's smile."

"It was almost frightful!" said the young queen. "And yet, François, your mother was very beautiful last evening with her dress of shimmering gold and her tan-colored veil,—a magnificent costume!"

"Yes, it was," replied the king; "and so, my *mignonne*, I have ordered a similar dress for you at Constantinople, through Monsieur de Grandchamp, and you shall also have a veil of Roman gauze like my mother's."

"Oh, thanks, my gallant spouse! Thanks! I certainly do not envy the fate of our sister Élisabeth of Spain, who, they say, never wears the same dress twice. And yet I should not like to have any woman in France, even your mother, seem to be more finely dressed than I, especially in your eyes."

"Ah, what difference does it make, after all?" said the king; "for will you not always be the loveliest of them all?"

"It hardly seemed so yesterday," pouted Mary; "for after the torch-dance that I danced, you never said a single word to me. I must needs think that you did not like it."

"Indeed I did!" cried François; "but what could

I say, in God's name, beside all those clever wits of the court who were pouring compliments upon you in prose and verse? Dubellay claimed that you had no need of a torch like the other ladies, but that the light that shone from your eyes was sufficient. Maisonneuve was appalled at the danger from the vivid sparks from your eyes which were never extinguished and might destroy the entire hall. Whereupon Ronsard added that the stars which shone in your head might serve to lighten the darkness of the night, and to put the sun to shame by day. Was there any need, pray, after all those poetic flights for me to come and add my poor testimony that I thought you and your dance fascinating?"

"Why not?" was Mary's playful retort. "That little word from you would have rejoiced my heart more than all their tasteless flattery."

"Well, then, I say it this morning, *mignonne*, with all my heart; for the dance was perfect, and almost made me forget the Spanish *pavane* which I used to like so much, and the Italian *pazzemeni*, which you and poor Élisabeth danced together so divinely. In fact, dear, whatever you do is always done better than what others do; for you are the fairest of the fair, and the prettiest women look like chambermaids beside you! Yes, in your royal attire or in this simple dishabille, you are always the same, my queen and my love. I see only you, and I love none but you!"

"Dear *mignon*!"

"My adored darling!"

"My life!"

"My supreme and only good! See! Though you had but a peasant's hood, I would love you better than all the queens of the earth!"

"For my own part," replied Mary, "though you were

but a simple page, you and none other would reign in my heart."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" added François, "how I love to pass my fingers through your soft silky, fair hair, and to play with it and tangle it! I can well imagine that your women might often ask leave to kiss that round white neck, and those arms, so beautifully turned and so plump. But don't you let them any more, Mary!"

"Why not, pray?"

"Because I am jealous!" said the king.

"Foolish child!" laughed Mary, with an adorable childish gesture.

"Ah!" cried François, passionately, "if I had to choose between renouncing my crown and my Mary, the choice would soon be made."

"What madness!" exclaimed Mary. "How could any one give up the crown of France, which is the fairest of all after the heavenly crown?"

"Because of the mark it makes upon my brow!" said François, with a smile that was half playful and half sad.

"What!" said Mary. "Oh, but I forgot that we have one matter to settle — and a matter of the most supreme importance — which my uncle De Lorraine has thrust upon us."

"Oh, ho!" cried the king; "that does not often happen."

"He leaves it for us," said Mary, very seriously, "to decide upon the color of the uniform of our Swiss Guards."

"That is a mark of confidence which does us great honor. Let us consult upon it. What is your Majesty's opinion upon this difficult question, Madame?"

"Oh, I must only speak after you, Sire."

"Well, then, I think that the style of the coat should

remain the same, — a broad doublet with full sleeves, with slashings in three colors. Am I not right?"

"Yes, Sire; but what shall the colors be? That is the question?"

"It is not an easy one; but that is because you do not help me, my fair adviser. The first color?"

"It ought to be white," said Mary, — "the color of France."

"Then the second," declared François, "shall be that of Scotland, — blue."

"Very well; but the third?"

"How would yellow do?"

"Oh, no; that is the color of Spain. Green would be better."

"That is the color of the Guises," said the king.

"Very well, Monsieur; is that a reason for excluding it?"

"No, indeed; but will these three colors harmonize well?"

"Well thought of!" cried Mary Stuart. "Let us take red, the color of Switzerland; it will be in a measure a reminder of their country to the poor fellows."

"An idea as kind as your heart, Mary," the king responded. "There! that momentous affair has come to a glorious conclusion. Ouf! we have had enough trouble with it; fortunately, more serious matters do not give us so much. And your dear uncles, Mary, are so willing to relieve me of all the burden of government! it is delightful! They do the writing, and I have only to sign my name, sometimes without even reading; so that my crown placed upon my royal couch would serve quite as well as I, if the whim should seize me to take a journey."

"Do you not feel sure, Sire," asked Mary, "that my

uncles will never have aught at heart save your interest and that of France ?”

“How can I help knowing it ?” was the reply. “They tell me of it too often to give me any hope of forgetting it. For instance, it is the day for a meeting of the council to-day ; and we shall see Monsieur le Cardinal de Lorraine come in with his deep humility and his overdone respect, — which do not always amuse me, I confess, — and shall hear him say in his soft voice, bowing at every word, ‘Sire, the suggestion I have the honor to make to your Majesty is aimed only at maintaining the honor of your crown. Your Majesty cannot doubt the zeal for the glory of your reign and the welfare of your people by which we are animated. Sire, the splendor of the throne and of the Church is the only end,’ etc.”

“How perfectly you imitate him !” cried Mary, laughing and clapping her hands.

But in a more serious tone she continued, —

“We must be indulgent and generous, François. Pray, do you suppose that your lady-mother, Catherine de Médicis, gives me much pleasure when, with her pale face sternly set, she reads me endless sermons upon my dress and my servants and my establishment ? Can you not hear her now saying to me, with her lips pursed up, ‘My daughter, you are the queen. I am to-day only the second woman in the kingdom ; but if I were in your place, I should require my women to attend Mass no less regularly than vespers and the sermon ; if I were in your place, I would never wear carnation velvet, because it is too gaudy a color ; if I were in your place, I would have my silver-gray dress made over, because it is too *décolletée* ; if I were in your place, I would never dance myself, but would be content to watch others ; if I were in your place —’ ”

"Oh, oh!" cried the king, shrieking with laughter; "it is my mother herself! But then, you see, *mignonne*, she is my mother, after all; and I have already offended her grievously by leaving no share for her in the affairs of State, which are entirely administered by your uncles; so we must put up with some things we don't like, and respectfully bear with her scolding. I, too, will resign myself to the gentle tutelage of the Cardinal de Lorraine, just because you are his niece, do you hear?"

"Thanks, dear Sire! — thanks for the sacrifice!" and Mary emphasized her words with a kiss.

"But, joking apart," continued François, "there are times when I am tempted to renounce the title of king, as I have already abandoned the power."

"Oh, why do you say that?" cried Mary.

"Because I feel it, Mary. Ah, if only it were not necessary to be King of France in order to be your husband! Just consider a moment! I have nought but the weariness and restraints of royalty. The humblest of our subjects is freer than I. Why, if I had not been downright angry at the suggestion, we should have had to occupy separate apartments! Why, do you suppose? Because they alleged that it was the custom of kings and queens of France!"

"How ridiculous they are with their customs!" exclaimed Mary. "Oh, well, we have changed all that, and established a new custom, — which, thank God, is much better than the other."

"To be sure it is, Mary. But, tell me, do you know the secret desire I have been cherishing for a long time?"

"No, — indeed I do not."

"Well, it is to break loose for a while, — to fly or

steal away, and leave the throne to take care of itself; to turn our backs upon Paris, Blois, yes, even upon France itself, and go—where? I don't know nor care, so long as it is far away from here, where we can breathe at our ease for a little while like other people. Mary, would not such a journey, say for six months or a year, please you?"

"Oh, I should be perfectly delighted, my beloved Sire," replied Mary, "especially for your sake; for I am sometimes unquiet about your health, and you suffer too frequently with these distressing headaches. The change of air and of scene would distract your thoughts, and be a most excellent thing for you. Yes, let us go, let us go! But, oh! the cardinal and the queen-mother, — will they listen to such a plan?"

"Well, after I am king and I am master," said François. "The kingdom is quiet and peaceable; and since they get along very well without my will in the government, they can do quite as well without my presence. We will take our flight in advance of the winter, Mary, like the swallows. Let us see. Where would you like to go? Suppose we were to visit your Scottish States?"

"What! cross the sea?" said Mary. "Expose your delicate chest, my *mignon*, to those dangerous fogs? No! I should prefer our smiling Touraine and this fair Château de Blois. But why should we not pay a visit to our sister Élisabeth in Spain?"

"The air of Madrid is not wholesome for kings of France, Mary."

"Oh, well! Italy, then!" suggested Mary. "It is always lovely there, and always warm, — blue sky and blue water; orange-trees in flower, and music, and continual holiday-making!"

"Italy accepted!" cried the king, joyously. "We will

see the Holy Catholic Religion in all its glory, — the magnificent churches and the relics of the saints.”

“And Raphael’s paintings,” added Mary, “and St. Peter’s, and the Vatican.”

“We will ask the Holy Father for his blessing, and will bring back our hands full of indulgences.”

“Oh, it will be delightful,” said the queen, “to realize this lovely dream together, side by side, beloved and loving, with heaven in our hearts, and on our heads —”

“Paradise!” cried François, enthusiastically.

But even as he spoke, carried away by the fascinating thought, the door opened suddenly, and the Cardinal de Lorraine, pushing aside the usher in attendance, who had no time to announce him, burst into the royal apartment, pale and breathless.

The Duc de Guise, less excited but quite as serious, followed his brother at a short distance, and his measured step could be heard in the antechamber through the door, which remained open.

CHAPTER XLII.

END OF THE ITALIAN JOURNEY.

"WELL, Monsieur le Cardinal," said the young king, warmly, "am I not to be allowed a moment of leisure and freedom even in this place?"

"Sire," replied Charles de Lorraine, "I am very sorry to disobey your Majesty's orders; but the affair which has led my brother and myself hither is of too great moment to admit of delay."

As he spoke, the Duc de Guise came gravely in, saluted the king and queen silently, and remained standing behind his brother, mute, immovable, and very serious.

"Very well! I am listening, Monsieur; therefore speak," said François to the cardinal.

"Sire," continued the latter, "a conspiracy against your Majesty has been discovered, and your life is no longer safe in this Château de Blois; you should depart hence immediately."

"A conspiracy! Depart from Blois!" exclaimed the king. "Pray, what does all this mean?"

"It means, Sire, that evil-minded men are conspiring against the life and the crown of your Majesty."

"What!" said François, "can they have any ill-will against me, so young as I am, and only seated on the throne yesterday? against me, who have never injured a single soul,—that is to say, knowingly or wilfully? Who are these evil-minded men, Monsieur le Cardinal?"

"Why, who should they be," rejoined Charles de Lorraine, "if not these cursed Huguenot heretics?"

"Heretics again!" cried the king. "Are you sure, Monsieur, that you are not allowing yourself to be led astray by suspicions which have no foundation in fact?"

"Alas!" said the cardinal, "there is, unhappily, no room for doubt now."

The young king, whose delightful dreams were thus interrupted by this unpleasant reality, seemed greatly annoyed; Mary was much disturbed by his ill-humor, and the cardinal very anxious over the news he had brought. Le Balafre, alone calm and self-controlled, awaited the result of all this talk in an attitude of utter impassibility.

"In God's name, what have I done to my people that they love me no longer?" continued François, bitterly.

"I think I told your Majesty that it is only the Huguenots who are rebellious," said the Cardinal de Lorraine.

"Well, they are Frenchmen!" rejoined the king. "In fact, Monsieur le Cardinal, I have intrusted all my power to your hands in the hope that you would cause it to be blessed, and yet I am continually encompassed by anxiety and complaints and discontent."

"Oh, Sire, Sire!" exclaimed Mary Stuart, reproachfully.

The Cardinal de Lorraine retorted dryly, —

"It would be hardly fair, Sire, to hold us responsible for ills which are due entirely to the troublous condition of the time."

"Nevertheless, Monsieur," continued the youthful king, "I should like for once to know the real condition of affairs, and to be without you at my side for a while,

so that I might ascertain whether the disaffection is directed against myself or you."

"Oh, your Majesty!" cried Mary Stuart, in great alarm.

François said no more, for he already reproached himself for having gone too far. The Duc de Guise did not manifest the least disturbance. Charles de Lorraine, after an embarrassing silence, replied, with the dignified and constrained air of a man unjustly offended, —

"Sire, since we are unfortunate enough to see that our efforts are misunderstood or not appreciated, and are therefore useless, it only remains for us, as your loyal subjects and devoted kinsmen, to give place to others more worthy or more fortunate —"

The king, in his confusion, said nothing; and the cardinal continued, after a pause, —

"Your Majesty has only to tell us in whose hands to place our seals of office. So far as I am concerned, nothing will be easier than to fill my place. Your Majesty will simply have to choose between Monsieur le Chancelier Olivier, Monsieur le Cardinal de Tournon, and Monsieur de l'Hôpital."

Mary Stuart hid her face in her hands in despair; while poor repentant François would have asked for nothing better than to recall his childish indignation, but the haughty silence of Le Balafré frightened him.

Charles de Lorraine continued: "The office of grand master, however, and the management of affairs in case of war, demand such extraordinary talents and such lofty renown that, after my brother, I can think of only two men who could venture to pretend to fill his place, — Monsieur de Brissac, perhaps —"

"Oh, Brissac is always scolding, and always in a pas-

sion!" exclaimed the king; "he is not to be thought of!"

"Well, the other one," continued the cardinal, "is Monsieur de Montmorency, who surely has the renown even though he lacks the necessary talents."

"Oh, no!" François objected again; "Monsieur le Connétable is too old for me, and he formerly treated the dauphin too slightly to make it probable that he would serve the king with due respect to-day. But, Monsieur le Cardinal, why do you omit to mention my other kinsmen, the princes of the blood, — the Prince de Condé, for example?"

"Sire," said the cardinal, "it is with deep regret that I inform your Majesty of the fact, but among the names of the secret leaders of the conspiracy that has been unearthed, that of the Prince de Condé stands first."

"Is it possible?" asked the young king, almost stupefied.

"Sire, there is no doubt about it."

"Then this must be really a serious conspiracy against the State?" said François.

"It is almost a rebellion, Sire," replied the cardinal; "and since your Majesty relieves my brother and myself from the most awful responsibility that has ever been laid upon us, my duty compels me to implore you to name our successors as soon as possible, — for the Huguenots will be under the walls of Blois in a few days."

"What do you say, my uncle?" cried Mary, in dismay.

"The truth, Madame."

"Are the rebels numerous?" asked the king.

"Sire, they are said to be two thousand strong," replied the cardinal. "There were rumors that their advance-guard was already near La Carrelière, but I could hardly believe them until Monsieur de Mouchy brought me in-

telligence of the conspiracy from Paris. We will withdraw now, Sire, Monsieur de Guise and myself — ”

“ What ’s that ? ” exclaimed François. “ Do you both select such a time of danger as this to desert me ? ”

“ But I thought I understood, Sire,” returned Charles de Lorraine, “ that such was your Majesty’s intention.”

“ What do you wish ? ” said the king. “ I cannot help being sad when I see how many enemies you have made — I mean how many enemies I have ! But come, let us say no more about it, good uncle ; give me more details as to the insolent attempt of these rebels.”

“ Pardon, Sire ! ” retorted the cardinal, still standing on his dignity ; “ after what your Majesty has said, it seems to me that others than ourselves — ”

“ Oh, dear uncle, I implore you to say no more about my hasty words, which I am sorry for,” said François II. “ What more can I say ? Must I apologize, pray, and ask your pardon ? ”

“ Oh, Sire ! ” said Charles de Lorraine, “ at the moment that your Majesty restores his precious confidence to us — ”

“ Entirely, and with all my heart,” added the king, offering his hand to the cardinal.

“ Just so much valuable time lost ! ” said the Duc de Guise, gravely.

It was the first word he had uttered since the beginning of the interview.

He came forward now, as if all that had gone before had been simply unimportant preliminaries, a wearisome prologue, in which he had allowed the Cardinal de Lorraine to sustain the principal part ; but these puerile discussions being at an end, he haughtily took the floor and assumed the initiative.

“ Sire,” said he to the king, “ this, in brief, is the con-

dition of affairs: two thousand rebels, commanded by Baron de la Renaudie, and encouraged underhand by the Prince de Condé, are preparing a descent at this time from Poitou, Béarn, and other provinces, with the view of surprising Blois and carrying off your Majesty."

François made a gesture of indignation and surprise.

"Carry off the king!" cried Mary Stuart.

"And you with him, Madame," continued Le Balafre. "But never fear; we will take good care of your Majesties."

"What measures do you propose to take?" asked the king.

"We received warning of this only an hour since," said the Duc de Guise. "But the first thing to do, Sire, is to assure the safety of your sacred person. For that purpose, it is necessary that you should leave this unfortified town of Blois and its unprotected château this very day, to withdraw to Amboise, where there is a fortified château which will protect you against a sudden blow."

"What!" said the queen; "imprison ourselves in that vile Château d'Amboise, perched up on top of a rock, and so gloomy and sad!"

"Child!" was what Le Balafre's harsh look said to his niece, though he did not put it in words.

He said simply, —

"Madame, it must be done!"

"But that will be flying from these rebels!" said the young king, trembling with rage.

"Sire," rejoined the duke, "you cannot fly from an enemy who has not yet attacked you, nor even declared war against you. We are supposed to be in ignorance of the guilty designs of these factionists."

"However, we do know them," said François.

"I beg your Majesty to rely upon me as regards these

questions of honor," replied François de Lorraine. "We do not shun the combat simply by changing the field of battle; and I sincerely hope that the rebels will take the trouble of following us to Amboise."

"Why do you say that you hope so, Monsieur?" asked the king.

"Why?" said Le Balafre, with his superb smile. "Because it will be a good opportunity to put an end once for all to heretics and heresy; because it is high time to strike at them in some other way than in fiction and allegory; because I would have given two fingers of my hand — my left hand — to bring about without difficulty the decisive struggle which these reckless fools are inviting, for our triumph."

"Alas!" sighed the king, "is this struggle anything less than civil war?"

"Let us accept it for the sake of having done with it," replied the Duc de Guise. "This, in a word, is my plan, — your Majesty must remember that we have only these rebels to deal with: Saving this retreat from Blois, which will not arouse their suspicions, I hope, we will affect the most complete security and most utter ignorance in regard to their plans. And when they advance upon us, like the traitors that they are, to surprise us, we shall be the ones to surprise them, and catch them in their own trap. Therefore let no sign of alarm escape you, or any appearance of flight; this advice is meant especially for you, Madame," he said, turning to Mary. "My orders will be given, and your people notified to be ready, but it will be done secretly. Let there be no suspicion outside of our preparations or our apprehensions, and I will answer for everything."

"What hour is fixed for our departure?" asked François, with a dejected air of resignation.

"Sire, three in the afternoon," said the duke; "I have taken all needful steps."

"What! before coming to me?"

"Even so, Sire," replied Le Balafre, firmly; "for before I came to you, I was perfectly sure that your Majesty would listen to the voice of reason and honor."

"Very well!" said the young king, with a feeble smile, completely conquered, "we will be ready at three o'clock, Monsieur; we have every confidence in you."

"Sire," said the duke, "I thank you for your confidence, and will strive to merit it. But I beg your Majesty to excuse me, for at such times minutes are precious, and I have twenty letters to write, and a hundred commissions to give out. Therefore my brother and myself will humbly take leave of your Majesty."

He saluted the king and queen quite abruptly, and went out with the cardinal.

François and Mary gazed at each other ruefully for a moment without speaking.

"Well, my darling," said the king at last, "how about our fair vision of a journey to Rome?"

"It seems to have resolved itself into a flight to Amboise," sighed Mary.

At this moment Madame Dayelle, the queen's first lady-in-waiting, appeared.

"Pray, Madame, is this true that I have heard?" said she, after the ordinary salutation. "Must we break up our establishment here at once, and quit Bloise for Amboise?"

"It is only too true, my poor Dayelle," replied Mary.

"Do you know, Madame, that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, in that château?—not even a decent mirror!"

"Then we must carry everything from here, Dayelle," said the queen. "Write out at once a list of the things we must have; I will dictate to you. In the first place, my new dress of crimson damask with gold lace trimming —"

Turning to the king, who was still standing in the window recess, thoughtful and sad, —

"Just fancy, Sire," said she, "the audacity of these Reformers! But, pardon me, you ought also to be thinking about what things you will need at Amboise, so that you will not be unprovided."

"No," said François; "I will leave all that to Aubert, my *valet de chambre*. I myself can think of nothing but my disappointment."

"Do you think mine is any less bitter?" said Mary. "Madame Dayelle, put down my violet farthingale covered with gold camblet, and my white damask dress with silver trimming. But we must make the best of it," she continued, addressing the king, "and not run the risk of being without articles of the first importance. Madame Dayelle, don't forget my bedgown of plain cloth-of-gold trimmed with lynx. Not for ages, Sire, has the old Château d'Amboise been inhabited by the court, has it?"

"Since the days of Charles VIII.," said François, "I do not think that a king of France has ever lived there for more than two or three days."

"And we may have to stay there a whole month!" exclaimed Mary. "Oh, those wretched Huguenots! Don't you think, Madame Dayelle, that the bedchamber at all events will be partly furnished?"

"The surest way, Madame," said the lady-in-waiting, shaking her head, "will be to go prepared to find nothing at all there."

"Then put down the gold-framed mirror," said the queen, "the violet velvet jewel-case, and the shaggy carpet to put around the bed. But have subjects ever before been known, Sire," she continued in a low tone, returning to the king's side, "to march against their master thus, and drive him from his own house, so to speak?"

"Never, I think, Mary," was François's melancholy reply. "Sometimes scoundrels have been known to resist the execution of the king's commands, as was the case fifteen years since at Mérindol and La Cabrière; but to attack the king in the first place, — I could never have imagined such a thing, I declare!"

"Oh, my uncle Guise is right, then! We cannot take too many precautions against these hot-headed rebels. Madame Dayelle, add a dozen or so pairs of shoes, and twelve pillows and sheets. Is that all? Really, I believe I am losing my mind! Wait a moment, my dear! Here, put in this velvet pincushion and this gold candlestick and bodkin and gilt needle-case. There, I see nothing else."

"Will not Madame carry her two jewel-cases?"

"Yes, indeed, I will carry them!" cried Mary, eagerly. "Leave them here! Why, they might fall into the hands of these miscreants, might they not, Sire? I am quite sure I will carry them."

"It will be a wise precaution," said François, with a slight smile.

"I think I have omitted nothing else of consequence, my dear Dayelle?" continued Mary, looking around the room.

"Madame will remember her 'Book of Hours,' I trust," said the maid-of-honor, rather affectedly.

"Ah, I should have forgotten them," said Mary, ingenu-

ously. "Let me have the finest ones, — the one which my uncle the cardinal gave me and the scarlet velvet one with the gold ornaments. Madame Dayelle, I leave you to look after all this. You see how preoccupied the king and myself are by the disagreeable necessity for this sudden departure."

"Madame has no need to quicken my zeal," said the duenna. "How many chests and trunks must I order to carry everything? Five will suffice, I should think."

"Order six, and go now!" replied the queen. "We must not fall short in this deplorable extremity, — six, without counting those of my women, remember! But let them make their own arrangements, for I have n't the heart to attend to all these details. Yes, François, I am like you; I can think of nothing but these Huguenots, alas! You may go now, Dayelle."

"Any orders for the footmen and coachmen, Madame?"

"Let them wear simply their cloth coats," said the queen. "Go, dear Dayelle, without further loss of time."

Dayelle bowed and had taken three or four steps toward the door, when Mary called her back.

"Dayelle," said she, "when I said that our people should wear only their cloth coats, you understand that I meant for the journey. Let them not fail to take with them their capes of violet velvet and their violet cloaks lined with yellow velvet. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Madame. Has Madame any other orders to give?"

"No, nothing more," said Mary. "But see that everything is done promptly; we have only about three hours. Don't forget the footmen's cloaks."

Dayelle left the room without further hindrance.

Mary then turned to the king.

"You approve of these cloaks for our people, Sire, do you not?" she asked. "The Reformers will surely allow us to dress our household as we think fitting. We must not humiliate royalty too much before the rebels. I even venture to hope, Sire, that we may find it possible to give a little fête in their faces at Amboise, though it be such a detestable place."

François shook his head rather gloomily.

"Oh, don't you sneer at the idea!" said Mary. "That would intimidate them more than you think, by letting them see that, after all, we are not much afraid of them. A ball under such circumstances would be most excellent politics, I am not afraid to say; and even your mother, capable woman that she is, could suggest nothing better. But no matter! For all that I say, my heart is none the less torn, my poor, dear Sire. Ah, the villanous Huguenots!"

CHAPTER XLIII.

TWO APPEALS.

SINCE the fatal tournament Gabriel had led a calm and retired but gloomy life. This man of energetic movement and action, whose days had formerly been so filled with life and excitement, now seemed to take delight only in solitude and forgetfulness.

He never appeared at court, never saw a friend, and scarcely ever left his house, where he passed the long, sad, and dreamy hours with his faithful old nurse Aloyse and the page André, who had come back to him when Diane de Castro had taken her sudden flight to the Benedictine convent at St. Quentin.

Gabriel, still a young man in years, had grown old from grief. He brooded over the past, and had no longer any hope.

How many times during those months, each of which was years long, had he regretted that he was still alive ! How many times did he wonder why the Duc de Guise and Mary Stuart had placed themselves between him and the anger of Catherine de Médicis, and had laid upon him the bitter burden of life ! What had he to do on earth ? What was he good for ? Could the tomb be any more barren of result than this existence in which he was languishing, — if, indeed, it could be called an existence ?

There were moments, however, when his youthful vigor rose in protest in spite of himself.

Then he would stretch his arms and raise his head and gaze at his sword. At such times he would have a vague feeling that his life was not ended, but that there was still a future for him, and that hours of hot fighting, and perhaps of victory, might sooner or later enter again into his destiny.

In view of everything, however, he could see only two chances of returning to the life of action for which he was best fitted, — a foreign war or religious persecution.

If France, if the king, should find themselves involved in some new war, undertaken for conquest, or to repel invasion, the Comte de Montgomery told himself that his youthful ardor would at once return, and that it would be pleasant for him to die as he had lived, — fighting.

And then how glad he would be to pay the involuntary debt he owed the Duc de Guise and young King François!

Again Gabriel would reflect that it would be a glorious thing to die in defence of the new truths which had shed their light upon his soul during the later days. The cause of the Reformation — in his eyes the cause of justice and liberty — was also a noble and saintly cause to serve.

The young count read assiduously the controversial books and sermons which then abounded. He burned with excitement over the great principles revealed in lofty and soul-stirring words by Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Théodore de Bèze, and so many others. The books of all these untrammelled thinkers had fascinated and convinced him, and drawn him on to adopt their principles. He would have been proud and happy to sign the attestation of his faith with his blood.

It was always the noble instinct of this noble heart to devote his life to some person or some cause.

Not long since he had risked his life a hundred times to save or to avenge, it might be his father or his beloved Diane, — oh, memories forever bleeding in that wounded heart! — and now, in default of those cherished beings, he would have been glad to struggle in defence of sacred ideas, —

His country in his father's place ; his religion in place of his love.

Alas, alas ! it is in vain to talk, for it is not the same thing ; and enthusiasm for abstract principles can never equal, either in its suffering or its delight, the enthusiasm of fondness for our fellow-creatures.

But yet for one or the other of these two causes, the Reformation or France, Gabriel would have been content to sacrifice his life ; and he relied upon one of them to bring about the desired termination of his career.

On the morning of the 6th of March Gabriel was leaning back in his chair in the corner of his fireplace, brooding over the thoughts which had become his very life, when Aloyse brought in to him a messenger, booted and spurred and covered with mud, as if he had just travelled a long way.

It was a rainy morning.

The courier had just arrived from Amboise, under a strong escort, the bearer of several letters from Monsieur le Duc de Guise, lieutenant-general of the kingdom.

One of the letters was addressed to Gabriel, and its contents were as follows : —

MY DEAR COMPANION, — I am writing this to you in great haste, with neither leisure nor possibility of explaining myself. You told the king and myself that you were devoted to us, and that if ever we were in need of your devoted service, we had only to call upon you.

We do call upon you to-day.

Set out at once for Amboise, where the king and queen are now installed for some weeks. I will tell you on your arrival in what way you can be of use.

It is always understood that you are quite at liberty to act or to hold aloof. Your zeal is too valuable for me to wish to make a bad use of it, or compromise you. But whether you are with us or prefer to remain neutral, I should think I was neglecting a duty if I failed to have confidence in you.

Come, therefore, in all haste, and you will be, as always, most welcome.

Your affectionate friend,

FRANÇOIS DE LORRAINE.

AMBOISE, the 4th March, 1560.

P. S. Herewith is a safe-conduct, for use in case you should be questioned *en route* by some royal troop.

The messenger from the Duc de Guise had already departed to execute his other commissions when Gabriel finished the letter.

The eager youth rose at once, and said without hesitation to the nurse, —

“Good Aloyse, call André, please, and tell him to have the dapple-gray saddled and to prepare my travelling wallet.”

“Are you going away, Monseigneur?” the good woman asked.

“Yes, nurse, to Amboise, within two hours.”

There was nothing more to be said; and Aloyse, without a word, went sadly from the room to see that her young master's orders were carried out.

But while his preparations were being made, behold, another messenger appeared, and demanded to speak with the Comte de Montgomery alone.

He made no commotion, and, unlike his predecessor, had no escort. He came in silently and very modestly,

and without uttering a sound, handed Gabriel a letter which he had in charge.

Gabriel started as he thought that he recognized him as the same who had formerly brought him La Renaudie's invitation to attend the Protestant meeting in the Place Maubert.

It was in fact the same man ; and the letter bore the same signature. It said : —

FRIEND AND BROTHER, — I did not wish to leave Paris without having seen you ; but I had no time, for events came thick and fast, and hurried me on. I must go now, and have not even pressed your hand, nor have I told you our plans and our hopes.

But we know that you are with us, and I know what manner of man you are.

With such as you there is no need of preparation, of meetings, and speech-making, — a word is sufficient.

This is the word : We need you. Come.

Be at Noizai near Amboise by the 10th or 12th of this month of March. You will find there your brave and noble friend De Castelnau. He will tell you what is going on, for I dare not trust it to paper.

It is agreed that you are in no wise bound ; that you have a perfect right to stand apart ; and that you may always abstain from acting with us without incurring the least suspicion or receiving the slightest reproach.

But in any event come to Noizai. I will meet you there, and we will seek your advice, if we cannot have your assistance.

Then, too, can anything be accomplished by our party unless you are informed with regard to it ?

So adieu till we meet at Noizai. We rely upon your presence, at all events.

L. R.

P. S. If any troop of our friends should fall in with you *en route*, our password is, once more, *Genève* ; and our countersign, *Gloire de Dieu* !

"In an hour I set out," said Gabriel to the silent messenger, who bowed and took his leave.

"What does all this signify?" Gabriel asked himself when he was alone; "and what is the meaning of these two appeals coming from parties so hostile, and appointing a rendezvous at almost the same place? But it makes no difference at all! My obligations toward the omnipotent duke and toward the oppressed Reformers are equally certain. My duty is to set out at once. Then come what come may! However difficult my position may become, my conscience knows well that I shall never turn traitor."

An hour later Gabriel began his journey, accompanied only by André.

But he hardly foresaw the extraordinary and terrible alternative by which his loyal soul was to be confronted.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A PERILOUS CONFIDENCE.

IN the Duc de Guise's apartments at the Château d'Amboise, Le Balafré himself was interrogating a tall, vigorous, nervous individual, with strongly marked features and proud and fearless bearing, who wore the uniform of a captain of arquebusiers.

"Maréchal de Brissac," said the duke, "has assured me, Captain Richelieu, that I may have the fullest confidence in you."

"Monsieur le Maréchal is very kind," said Richelieu.

"It seems that you are ambitious, Monsieur," continued Le Balafré.

"Monseigneur, I am at least ambitious not to remain captain of arquebusiers all my life. Although I come of very good stock (for there were lords of Plessis on the field at Bovines), I am the fifth of six brothers, and consequently I have to do my best to eke out my little fortune, and not depend too much upon my patrimony."

"Good!" said the Duc de Guise, with an air of satisfaction. "You have the opportunity now, Monsieur, to do us good service, and you shall not repent it."

"Behold me, Monseigneur, ready to undertake whatever you please to intrust to me."

"To begin with," said Le Balafré, "I have ordered that you command the guard at the principal entrance of the château."

"Where I promise to give a good account of myself, Monseigneur."

"In my opinion," continued the duke, "it is not likely that the Protestants will be sufficiently ill-advised to make their assault on a side where they will be obliged to carry seven doors one after the other; but as nobody is to be allowed to enter or leave the place by any other entrance, the post will be of the greatest importance. Therefore let nobody pass, either from within or without, without a special order signed by me."

"It shall be done, Monseigneur. By the way, a young gentleman, called the Comte de Montgommery, has just arrived, with no special order, but with a safe-conduct bearing your signature. He comes from Paris, he says. Shall I allow him to come in, as he asks, Monseigneur?"

"Yes, yes, at once!" said the Duc de Guise, eagerly. "But wait a moment; I have not completed my instructions to you. To-day, about noon, the Prince de Condé will present himself at the gate where you are to be on guard: we have sent for him that we might have at our hand the reputed chief of the rebels, who, I'll wager, will not dare to furnish food for our suspicions by failing to neglect our summons. You will open to him, Captain Richelieu, but to no other—not even to such as come with him. You will be careful to have all the recesses and casemates which there are in the arch well filled with men; and as soon as he arrives, you will parade them all, arquebuse in hand, and matches lighted, under pretence of receiving him with the proper honors."

"It shall be done as you say, Monseigneur," said Richelieu.

"When the Huguenots attack," continued the duke, "and the action begins, you must personally keep your eye upon our man, Captain; and, mark my words well, if he

stirs one step, or gives the least sign of an inclination to join the assailants, or if he even hesitates to draw his sword against them, as his duty calls upon him to do, do not hesitate with your own hands to strike him down."

"I can see no difficulty about this, Monseigneur," said Captain Richelieu, simply, "except that my rank as a simple captain of arquebusiers will make it rather hard, perhaps, for me to be always as near him as I ought to be."

Le Balafré reflected a minute, and said, —

"Monsieur le Grand Prieur and the Duc d'Aumale, who will never quit the supposed traitor's side for a moment, will give you the signal, and you will obey them."

"I will obey them, Monseigneur," replied Richelieu.

"Good!" said the Duc de Guise; "I have no other orders to give you, Captain. You may go. If the glory of your house began with Philippe Auguste, you may well begin it anew with the Duc de Guise. I rely upon you, and you may rely upon me. Go. Introduce Monsieur de Montgommery at once, if you please."

Captain Richelieu bowed deeply and withdrew.

A few minutes later Gabriel was announced. He was sad and pale; and the cordial welcome which the Duc de Guise extended to him did not smooth the trouble from his brow.

In fact, after putting together his own conjectures and a few words which the guards had not scrupled to let fall in the presence of a gentleman bearing the duke's safe-conduct, the young enthusiast had almost arrived at the truth.

The king who had pardoned him and the party to which he was devoted, body and soul, were openly at war, and his loyalty was likely to be compromised in the struggle.

"Well, Gabriel," began the duke, "you ought to know by this time why I have sent for you."

"I suspect the reason, but am not altogether sure of it, Monseigneur," Gabriel replied.

"The Protestants are in open rebellion," said Le Balafre, "and are in arms, and on their way to attack the Château d'Amboise, — that is our latest intelligence."

"It is a grievous and appalling state of things," observed Gabriel, reflecting on his own situation.

"Why, my friend, it is a magnificent opportunity," retorted the duke.

"What do you mean, Monseigneur?" said Gabriel, in amazement.

"I mean that the Huguenots expect to surprise us, whereas we are all ready for them. I mean that their plans are discovered and betrayed. It is fair warfare, since they have been the first to draw the sword; but our enemies are about to deliver themselves into our hands. They are lost, I tell you."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed the Comte de Montgomery, completely crushed.

"Judge for yourself," continued Le Balafre, "to what extent all the details of their insane enterprise are known to us. On the 16th of March, at noon, they are to assemble before the town and attack us. They have friends in the king's guard; therefore the guard was changed. Their friends were to open the western gate to them; but that gate is walled up. Lastly, their different bands were to proceed secretly hither through certain paths in the forest of Château-Regnault. The royal troops will fall upon these detached parties unexpectedly as fast as they appear, and will not allow half of their forces to reach Amboise. We are accurately informed, and thoroughly upon our guard, I should say!"

"Thoroughly!" replied Gabriel, in great alarm. "But who has been able to furnish you with such complete information?" he added in his perplexity, and without realizing what he said.

"Ah," rejoined Le Balafré, "there are two who have betrayed all their plans, — one for money, the other from fear. Two traitors they are, I admit, — one a paid spy, the other a faint-hearted alarmist. The spy — whom you know perhaps, as many of our friends do, and whom you should distrust — is the Marquis de —"

"No, do not tell me!" cried Gabriel, quickly; "do not give me their names! I asked you for them thoughtlessly. You have already told me quite enough; but there is nothing more difficult for a man of honor than not to betray traitors."

"Oh," said the Duc de Guise, with some surprise, "we all have perfect confidence in you, Gabriel. We were speaking of you only yesterday with the queen; I told her that I had written you, and she was very much pleased."

"Why did you write to me, Monseigneur? You have not yet informed me."

"Why?" rejoined Le Balafré. "Because the king has but a few devoted and reliable servants. You are among them, and you are to command a party against the rebels."

"Against the rebels? Impossible!" said Gabriel.

"Impossible! And why impossible, pray?" returned Le Balafré. "I am not in the habit of hearing that word from your lips, Gabriel."

"Monseigneur," said Gabriel, "I also am of the Religion."

The Duc de Guise leaped to his feet, and gazed at the count with an expression of wonder which amounted almost to terror.

"Matters are in this condition," Gabriel continued, smiling sadly : "if it be your pleasure, Monseigneur, to put me face to face with the English or Spaniards, you know that I will not draw back, but that I will offer my life for my country with joy, as well as with devotion ; but in a civil, a religious, war against my fellow-countrymen, my brothers, I am compelled, Monseigneur, to reserve the freedom of action which you were good enough to insure me."

"You a Huguenot !" the duke finally succeeded in ejaculating.

"And a most devoted one, Monseigneur," said Gabriel ; "it is my crime, and my excuse therefor as well. I believe utterly in the new ideas, and have given my heart to them."

"And your sword too, without doubt ?" was the duke's biting rejoinder.

"No, Monseigneur," said Gabriel, gravely.

"Come, come !" retorted Le Balafré ; "do you expect to make me believe that you know nothing of this plot which has been concocted against the king by your brothers, as you call them, and that these same brothers cheerfully renounce so gallant an ally as you ?"

"You must believe just that," said the young count, more seriously than ever.

"Then you must be the one to desert them," rejoined the duke ; "for your new faith compels you to choose between two breaches of faith, — that's all."

"Oh, Monsieur !" cried Gabriel, reproachfully.

"Well, how can you arrange matters otherwise ?" asked Le Balafré, throwing his cap with an angry movement upon the chair he had just quitted.

"How can I arrange matters otherwise ?" repeated Gabriel, with a cold and almost stern demeanor.

"Why, it's very simple. In my opinion, the falseness of the position in which a man is placed the more sincere and outspoken he should be. When I became a Protestant I steadfastly and loyally declared to the leaders of the sect that my sacred obligations to the king and queen and the Duc de Guise would absolutely prevent me from bearing arms in their ranks during this reign, if indeed the occasion should arise. They know that in my eyes the Reformation is a matter of religious belief, and not of party feeling. With them as with you, Monseigneur, I stipulated for absolute freedom of action; and I have the right to refuse my aid to them, as I refuse it to you. In this desperate conflict between my gratitude and my faith my heart will bleed with every blow that is struck; but my arm will not strike one. That, Monseigneur, is wherein you have failed to understand me; and in this way, I trust, by remaining neutral, to continue to be honorable and honored."

Gabriel spoke proudly and with much animation. Le Balafre, gradually regaining his tranquillity, could but admire the frankness and the nobleness of heart of his former comrade-in-arms.

"You are a strange man, Gabriel," he pensively remarked.

"Why strange, Monseigneur? Is it because I speak as I act and act as I speak? I knew nothing of this conspiracy of the Protestants, I swear. However, I admit that when I was at Paris I received, on the same day that your letter arrived, a letter from one of them; but this letter was as barren of explanation as yours, and said simply, 'Come.' I had a foreboding of the dread dilemma in which I should be involved; but I have, nevertheless, responded to this twofold appeal. Monseigneur, I have come so that I might prove recreant to

neither of my duties; I have come to say to you, 'I cannot fight against those whose faith I share,' and to say to them, 'I cannot fight against those who have spared my life.'"

The Duc de Guise held out his hand to the count.

"I was wrong," said he, cordially. "Pray, attribute my angry impulse to my chagrin at finding you, upon whom I have relied so confidently, among my enemies."

"Your enemy!" exclaimed Gabriel. "Ah, no!—I am not and never can be that, Monseigneur. Because I have declared myself more openly than they, am I any more your enemy than the Prince de Condé and Monsieur de Coligny, who are, as I am, Protestants, and not under arms?"

"Under arms! I beg your pardon, but they are," returned Le Balafre. "I know it,—I know all! But their arms are hidden. Nevertheless, if we should meet, it is certain that I should dissimulate even as they do, should call them my friends, and in case of need officially bear witness to their entire innocence, — a comedy, it is true, but a necessary one."

"Well, then, Monseigneur," said Gabriel, "since you are so kind as sometimes to lay aside conventionalities in dealing with me, tell me, I beg you, that when politics are not in question, you can still believe in my devotion to you, and my honor, Huguenot though I be; above all things, assure me that if a foreign war should break out some day, you would do me the favor to remind me of my word, and give me an opportunity to die for my king and country."

"Yes, Gabriel," said the duke, "while I deplore the difference in faith which now separates us, I trust you and shall always trust you the same; and in order to

prove it to you and to redeem the momentary suspicion which I so deeply regret, take this and make such use of it as you please."

He sat down at a table and wrote a line which he signed and handed to the young count.

"It is an order allowing you to leave Amboise, wherever you may wish to go," said he. "With this paper you are entirely at liberty. And you may be sure that I would not give any such mark of esteem and confidence to the Prince de Condé, whom you just mentioned, and that the moment he sets foot in this château he will be watched from a distance like an enemy, and guarded unknowingly as closely as a prisoner."

"In that case, I refuse this mark of your confidence and esteem, Monseigneur," said Gabriel.

"What! Why so?" asked the amazed duke.

"Monseigneur, do you know whither I shall go at once, if you allow me to leave Amboise?"

"That is your affair, and I do not even ask to know," rejoined Le Balafré.

"But I propose to tell you," said Gabriel. "When I leave you, Monseigneur, I shall go to fulfil my other duty: I shall go at once among the rebels, and shall seek for one of them at Noizai."

"At Noizai? Castelnau is in command there," remarked the duke.

"Yes, he is; you are indeed well informed in every detail, Monseigneur."

"What do you propose to do at Noizai, my unfortunate friend?" Le Balafré asked him.

"Ah, what shall I do indeed? Say to them, 'You summoned me, and I am here; but I can do nothing for you;' and if they question me as to what I have heard and noticed on the road, I must keep silent and not warn

them of the trap that you have laid for them, for your confidence in me takes away my right to do that. Therefore, Monseigneur, I ask a favor at your hands — ”

“ What is it ? ”

“ Retain me in custody here, and thus save me from cruel perplexity, — for if you allow me to go, I must make my appearance among those who are bent on their own destruction ; and if I do go to them, I shall not be at liberty to save them.”

“ Gabriel,” returned the Duc de Guise, “ upon due reflection I neither can nor will exhibit such suspicion. I have unfolded to you my whole plan of campaign, and you are going among your friends, who are vitally interested in knowing that plan, — yet here is your passport.”

“ Then, Monseigneur,” replied Gabriel, overwhelmed, “ at least grant me this last favor in the name of what little I was able to do to enhance your renown at Metz and in Italy and at Calais, and in the name of what I have suffered since, — and indeed, I have suffered bitterly.”

“ To what do you refer ? ” said the duke. “ If I can, I will grant it, my friend.”

“ You can, Monseigneur, and I think that you ought, because those who are in arms against you are Frenchmen. I ask you, then, to allow me to divert them from their fatal project, not by revealing to them its inevitable issue, but by advising them, and beseeching and imploring them.”

“ Gabriel, be careful ! ” said the duke, solemnly ; “ if one word as to our preparations falls from your lips, the rebels will persist in their design, simply modifying their mode of execution ; and in that event the king and Mary Stuart and myself will be the ones to be destroyed. Weigh this well. Will you bind yourself upon your

honor as a gentleman that you will not let them divine or even suspect, by a word or an allusion or a gesture, anything of what is going on here ? ”

“ Upon my honor as a gentleman, I swear it ! ”

“ Go, then,” said the Duc de Guise, “ and do your best to induce them to abandon their criminal purpose, and I will gladly renounce my easy victory, thinking how much French blood is spared. But if, as I believe, our last reports are well-founded, they have such blind and obstinate confidence in the success of their enterprise that you will fail, Gabriel. But no matter ! go and make a last effort. For their sakes, and still more for yours, I have no disposition to refuse.”

“ In their names and my own I thank you, Monseigneur.”

A quarter of an hour later he was on his way to Noizai.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DISLOYALTY OF LOYALTY.

BARON CASTELNAU DE CHALOSSES was a gallant, noble-minded youth to whom the Protestants had assigned by no means the least difficult task when they sent him to forestall the royal troops at the Château de Noizai, which was the place appointed for the general rendezvous of the different sections of the disaffected on the 16th of March. It was essential that he should be visible to the Huguenots, but should conceal himself from the Catholics; and his delicate position called for the display of as much caution and presence of mind as courage.

Thanks to the password contained in La Renaudie's letter, Gabriel met with no hindrance in making his way to Baron de Castelnau's quarters.

It was already afternoon of the 15th.

Within eighteen hours the Protestants were to assemble at Noizai, and to attack Amboise before twenty-four hours had elapsed; so that it is clear there was no time to lose if they were to be dissuaded from their design.

Baron de Castelnau knew Comte de Montgommery well, for he had often met him at the Louvre, and besides, the chief men of the party had often spoken of him in his presence.

He came forward to meet him, and received him as a friend and an ally.

"So you have come, Monsieur de Montgommery," he remarked when they were alone. "To tell the truth, I

hoped that you would be here, but hardly dared to expect you. La Renaudie was much blamed by the admiral for writing you as he did. 'It was essential,' he said, 'to advise the Comte de Montgomery of our plans, but not to summon him to join us. He might have been left to do as he chose. Has the count not given us fair warning that so long as François II. reigned, his sword did not belong to us; in fact, that it did not even belong to himself?' La Renaudie's reply to all this was that his letter bound you to nothing, but left you in possession of absolute independence of action."

"That is quite true," replied Gabriel.

"Nevertheless, we thought that you would come," continued Castelnau, "for the letter of that hot-headed baron gave you no information as to what was going on, and I am intrusted with the duty of informing you of our plan and our hopes."

"I am listening," said the Comte de Montgomery.

Castelnau then repeated to Gabriel everything that the Duc de Guise had previously told him in detail.

Gabriel saw with horror how exact Le Balafre's information was. Not one single point in the report of his spies and informers was inaccurate, nor had they omitted to apprise him of one single detail of the plot.

The conspirators were really lost beyond recall.

"Now you know everything," said Castelnau, as he brought his narration to a close, leaving his listener a prey to most cruel perplexity. "I have now only to put to you a question to which I can easily forecast your reply. I am right, am I not, in thinking that you cannot join us?"

"I cannot," replied Gabriel, sadly shaking his head.

"Very good!" added Castelnau; "we shall be none the

less good friends for that. I know that you stipulated in advance for the privilege of holding aloof from the combat ; and you are doubly entitled to exercise it, since we are sure of victory."

"Are you then indeed so sure?" asked Gabriel, significantly.

"Perfectly so," rejoined the baron ; "for the enemy have no suspicion of our movements, and will be taken unawares. We were afraid for a moment, when the king and court transferred their quarters from the unfortified town of Blois to the strong Château d'Amboise, for they clearly had a suspicion that something was wrong."

"That embarrassed you, no doubt," observed Gabriel.

"Yes, but our hesitation soon came to an end," continued Castelnau ; "for we found that this unexpected change of residence, far from injuring our prospects, on the contrary, served marvellously well to make them brighter. The Duc de Guise is now sleeping in false security ; and you must know, dear Count, that we are in correspondence with some who are within the town, and the western gate will be put into our hands as soon as we present ourselves before it. Oh, success is beyond doubt, I assure you ; and you may, without scruple, hold aloof from the battle."

"The most magnificent expectations are sometimes deceived by the event," was Gabriel's grave comment.

"But in this instance we have not a single chance against us, — not one !" Castelnau repeated, rubbing his hands with delight. "To-morrow will behold the triumph of our party and the fall of the Guises."

"And — how about treachery?" said Gabriel, struggling with his emotion, and with his heart torn to see such youthful gallantry rushing headlong into the abyss with eyes closed.

"Treachery is impossible," was Castelnau's imperturbable response to that suggestion. "Only the leaders are in the secret, and not one of them is capable of it. Upon my word, Monsieur de Montgomery," he exclaimed, interrupting himself, "I believe that you are jealous of us; and it seems to me as if you were trying with all your might to throw cold water on our undertaking, because of your chagrin at having no share in it. Fie, my envious friend!"

"Yes, indeed, I do envy you!" returned Gabriel, gloomily.

"There! I was sure of it," laughingly exclaimed the young baron.

"But stay a moment; you have some confidence in me, have you not?"

"Blind confidence, if we are to speak soberly."

"Very well; are you willing to listen to good advice, coming from a true friend?"

"To what purpose?"

"Abandon your design of taking Amboise to-morrow. Send trusty messengers at once to all of our brethren who are to join you here to-night or in the morning, to let them know that the plan has miscarried, or has at least been postponed."

"Why so, pray? Why?" demanded Castelnau, beginning to take alarm. "You must surely have some weighty reason for speaking thus to me."

"*Mon Dieu*, no!" replied Gabriel, with a constraint that cost him dear.

"It cannot be," said Castelnau, "that you advise me for no reason whatever to abandon, and cause my brethren to abandon likewise, a project which seems to progress so favorably?"

"No, there is a reason; you are quite right, but I can-

not explain to you. Can you not, will you not, believe my word? I have already gone further in this matter than I should have done. Do me the honor to trust my word, dear friend."

"Consider," rejoined Castelnau, very seriously, "that if I take upon myself this extraordinary course of turning back at the last moment, I shall have to answer for it to La Renaudie and the other leaders. May I refer them to you?"

"Yes," replied Gabriel.

"Will you tell them," continued Castelnau, "the motives which dictate your advice?"

"Alas! I have not the right to do it."

"How can you expect me to yield to your representations, then? Should I not be bitterly reproached for having thus, for a single word, destroyed our hopes, which were almost certainty? Howsoever vast and well-deserved is the confidence we all have in you, Monsieur de Montgomery, still a man is but a man, and may be deceived, no matter how good his intentions. If no one is allowed to consider and pass judgment upon your reasons, we shall certainly be obliged to neglect your counsel."

"Then beware!" rejoined Gabriel, harshly; "on your head alone be the responsibility for all the calamities that may ensue!"

Castelnau was struck with the accent with which the count uttered these words.

"Monsieur de Montgomery," said he, "light has suddenly come to me, and I think I can descry the true state of affairs. You have either been intrusted with or have surmised some secret which you are not permitted to disclose. You have some important information as to the probable result of our enterprise,—that we have been betrayed, for instance. Am I not right?"

"I did not say that!" cried Gabriel, eagerly.

"Or else," continued Castelnau, "you saw your friend, the Duc de Guise, on your way here, and he, in ignorance of your fellowship with us, has given you an insight into the real state of things."

"Nothing I have said can have given rise to any such supposition!" cried Gabriel.

"Or again," Castelnau went on, "you have, as you passed through Amboise, noticed preparations being made, overheard conversations, or induced confidences, — in short, our plot is discovered!"

"Do you mean to say," said Gabriel, horror-stricken, "that I have given you any reason to believe anything of the sort?"

"No, Monsieur le Comte; no, indeed, for you were bound to secrecy, I can see. Therefore I do not even ask you for a positive assurance that I am right, not even a word, if you prefer not. But if I am mistaken, a gesture, a glance of the eye, or your silence, even, will be sufficient to enlighten me."

Gabriel, meanwhile, sorely perplexed, was recalling the last part of the obligation he had given the Duc de Guise.

Upon his honor as a gentleman he had bound himself not to allow any person to divine or even to suspect, from any word or allusion or gesture on his part, what was taking place at Amboise.

As he kept silence for a long while, the Baron de Castelnau, whose eyes were riveted upon Gabriel's face, spoke again.

"Do you mean to say nothing more?" said he. "You are silent; I understand you, and shall act accordingly."

"What do you propose to do?" asked Gabriel, hastily.

"To warn La Renaudie and the other leaders, as you

advised me to do in the first place, that they must cease their preparations, and to announce to our friends when they reach here that some one in whom we have perfect confidence has made known to me — has made known to me probable treachery — ”

“ But there is nothing of the sort ! ” Gabriel hurriedly interrupted. “ I have given you no information at all, Monsieur de Castelnau ! ”

“ Count,” rejoined Castelnau, seizing Gabriel’s hand in a grasp that spoke louder than his words, “ may not your reticence itself be a warning, and our salvation ? And once put on our guard, then — ”

“ Well, what then ? ” echoed Gabriel.

“ Everything will go well for us, and ill for them,” said Castelnau. “ We will postpone our enterprise to a more propitious time ; discover at any cost the informers, if there be any among us ; redouble our precautions and our mystery ; and one fine day, when everything is thoroughly prepared, certain then of our aim, we will renew our attempt, and, thanks to you, will not fail, but achieve a triumphant success.”

“ That is precisely what I wish to avoid ! ” cried Gabriel, who was horrified to find himself upon the verge of involuntary betrayal of confidence. “ There, Monsieur de Castelnau, is the real reason of my warning and my advice. In my mind, your enterprise is absolutely a culpable one, to say nothing of its danger. By attacking the Catholics you put yourselves entirely in the wrong, and justify any reprisals they may resort to. From being unjustly oppressed subjects, you become rebels. If you have complaints to make of the ministers, must you avenge yourselves upon our young king ? Ah, I feel sad even unto death as I reflect upon all this misery ! For the good of the cause you ought forever to renounce this

unholy strife. Rather let your principles do battle for you! No bloodshed for the truth! That is all that I wished to say to you; that is why I conjure you and all our brethren to hold your hand from these grievous civil wars, which can only retard the spread of our principles."

"Is that really the only motive of all your talk?" asked Castelnau.

"The only one," Gabriel replied in a hollow voice.

"Then I must thank you for your good intentions, Monsieur le Comte," retorted Castelnau, coldly; "but I must no less continue to act on the lines laid down for me by the leaders of the Reformed party. I can readily conceive that it must be very painful for a gentleman like yourself, being debarred from the combat, to see others fighting without you; but you alone cannot be allowed to fetter and paralyze a whole army."

"You propose, then," said Gabriel, pale and dejected, "to allow the others to go on with this fatal design, and to go on with it yourself?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte," responded Castelnau, whose words had a firmness in them that admitted no argument; "and with your permission, I will now go to issue the necessary orders for to-morrow's assault."

He saluted Gabriel, and left the room without awaiting his reply.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

GABRIEL did not leave the Château de Noizai, however, but determined to pass the night there. His presence would afford the Reformers a pledge of his good faith, in case they were attacked; and beyond that, he still retained some slight hope that in the morning he might prevail, if not upon Castelnau, upon some other leader who was less blindly obstinate. If La Renaudie would only come!

Castelnau left him entirely free, and seemed inclined to be rather disdainful in his avoidance of him.

Gabriel encountered him several times during the evening in the halls and corridors of the château, going hither and thither, giving orders for reconnoitring parties and the forwarding of supplies.

But not a single word was exchanged between the two youths, each as proud and as noble as the other.

During the long hours of that night of anguish the Comte de Montgomery, too restless and anxious to sleep, remained upon the ramparts, listening, meditating, and praying.

With the first glimmer of dawn, the Protestant troops began to arrive in small detached parties.

At eight o'clock they had already assembled in large numbers; and at eleven Castelnau could count all whom he expected.

But not one of the leaders was known to Gabriel. La Renaudie had sent word that he and his forces would make their way to Amboise by way of the forest of Château-Regnault.

Everything was ready for departure. Captains Mazères and Raunay, who were to lead the advance-guard, had already gone down to the terrace in front of the château to form their detachments in marching order. Castelnau was triumphant.

“Well,” he remarked to Gabriel as he encountered him, — he had, in his satisfaction, forgiven the conversation of the night before, — “well, you see, Monsieur le Comte, that you were wrong; and everything is going on as well as possible!”

“Wait!” said Gabriel, shaking his head.

“Indeed, we must wait, if we are to believe you, doubter!” said Castelnau, smiling. “Not one of our people has failed to keep his engagement; they have all arrived at the time appointed, with more men than they had promised. They have all marched through their respective provinces without being disturbed, and — what is perhaps even better — without having created any disturbance. Is it not, in truth, almost too good fortune?”

The baron was interrupted by the sound of trumpets and the clangor of arms and a great noise outside; but in the intoxication of his confidence he was in no degree alarmed, and thought of nothing but some fortunate event.

“See!” said he to Gabriel; “I will engage that those are more unexpected reinforcements, — Lamothe, doubtless, and Deschamps, with the conspirators of Picardy. They were not due to arrive until to-morrow; but they must have made forced marches, the brave fellows, in

order to bear their part of the conflict and share in the victory. Those are friends."

"Ah, but are they?" asked Gabriel, whose face changed color when he heard the trumpets.

"Who else can they be?" rejoined Castelnau. "Come into this gallery, Monsieur le Comte; through the embrasures we can look down upon the terrace whence the noise comes."

He drew Gabriel after him; but when they had reached the edge of the wall he uttered a loud cry, raised his arms, and stood as if turned to stone.

The confusion had been occasioned not by Protestant troops, but by a body of Royalists. The new-comers were not commanded by Lamothe, but by Jacques de Savoie, Duc de Nemours.

Under cover of the woods which surrounded the Château de Noizai, the royal troops had succeeded before they were discovered in getting within close range of the open terrace, where the advance-guard of the rebels was being drawn up in order of battle.

There was no show of resistance whatever, for the Duc de Nemours had made it his first care to seize the stacks of arms.

Mazères and Raunay had been obliged to surrender without striking a blow; and just at the moment when Castelnau looked down from the battlements, his troops, conquered without a struggle, were handing their swords to the enemy. On the spot where he had thought he should see his soldiers, he saw nought but a band of prisoners.

He could scarcely believe his eyes. For a moment he stood motionless, stupefied, bewildered, and speechless. Such an event was so entirely at variance with his thoughts that at first he found it difficult to understand it.

Gabriel, who was less surprised at this sudden blow, was no less overwhelmed.

As they stood gazing at each other, equally pale and dejected, an ensign entered hastily in search of Castelnau.

"What is the condition of affairs?" the latter asked him, recovering his voice, by force of his anxiety.

"Monsieur le Baron," the ensign replied, "they have gained possession of the drawbridge and the first gate. We only had time to close the second one; but we shall not be able to hold it, and in less than a quarter of an hour they will be in the courtyard. Shall we, nevertheless, try to resist, or send them a flag of truce? We await your orders."

"Give me but time to put on my armor, and I will come down," said Castelnau.

He hastened into one of the apartments of the château to buckle on his sword and cuirass, and Gabriel followed him.

"What do you propose to do?" he asked him, sadly.

"I know not; I know not!" replied Castelnau, excitedly; "but I can at least die."

"Alas!" sighed Gabriel; "why did you not hearken to me yesterday?"

"Yes, you were right, I can see now," returned the baron. "You anticipated what has happened; perhaps you knew of it beforehand."

"Perhaps," observed Gabriel; "and therein lies my greatest suffering. But remember, Castelnau, that life is full of strange and awful caprices of fate! Suppose that I was not at liberty to dissuade you by divulging the real reasons, which were struggling for utterance? Suppose that I had given my word of honor as a gentleman not to give you any occasion, directly or indirectly, to suspect the truth?"

"In such case you would have done quite right to say nothing," said Castelnau; "and in your place I should have done just as you did. It was I, madman, who should have understood you; I who should have known that a valiant heart like yours would not try to dissuade me from battle except for most potent reasons. But I will expiate my mistake by death."

"Then I will die with you," said Gabriel, calmly.

"You! and why?" cried Castelnau. "The one thing that you say you are absolutely compelled to do is to refrain from fighting."

"True, I shall not fight," said Gabriel; "I cannot. But life has become a grievous burden to me; the apparently two-faced part I am playing is intolerable. I shall go into the fray unarmed. I will slay no one, but will allow myself to be slain. I may be able to intercept the blow aimed at you. If I cannot wear a sword, I may still be a buckler."

"No," rejoined Castelnau, "remain here. I ought not to involve you in my destruction, nor will I do it."

"Ah, but think!" exclaimed Gabriel, earnestly; "you are about to involve in it, uselessly and hopelessly, all of our brethren who are confined in this château with you. My life is much less useful than theirs."

"Can I do otherwise for the glory of our faith than ask them to make this sacrifice?" said Castelnau. "Martyrs often bring more renown to their cause, and are more useful to it, than victors."

"Very true," replied Gabriel; "but is it not your first duty as leader to do your utmost to save the forces which have been intrusted to you; to die finally at their head, if their salvation is not to be reconciled with honor?"

"So you advise me —" said Castelnau.

"To try every peaceable means of accommodation. If

you resist, you have no possible chance of escaping defeat and massacre. If you yield to necessity, they will not have the right, in my opinion, to punish the instigators of a plan that has been left unexecuted. Mere projects cannot be punished, since they can only be conjectured. By laying down your arms, you will disarm your enemies."

"I so bitterly repent not having followed your previous advice," said Castelnau, "that I prefer to follow it now; and yet I confess that I hesitate, for it is very distasteful to me to draw back."

"In order to draw back, you must first have taken a step forward," said Gabriel. "Now what is there up to this point to prove your rebellion? You do not declare yourself culpable until you actually draw your sword. Hold! My presence may even yet, thank God! be of some advantage to you. I was unable to save you yesterday, but do you wish that I should try to save you to-day?"

"What will you do?" asked Castelnau, completely unmanned.

"Nothing unworthy of you, be assured! I will go to the Duc de Nemours, who commands the royal soldiery. I will inform him that no resistance will be offered, that the gates will be opened, and you will surrender, but upon certain conditions: he must engage his ducal word that no harm shall befall you or your comrades, and that after he has escorted you to the king, in order to submit to him your grievances and requests, he will cause you to be set at liberty."

"And if he refuses?" asked Castelnau.

"If he refuses, the fault will be on his side; he will have declined a perfectly frank and honorable adjustment of the affair, and all the responsibility for the bloodshed

will fall upon his head. If he refuses, Castelnau, I will return to you, to die at your side."

"Do you believe," said Castelnau, "that La Renaudie, were he placed as I am, would agree to what you propose?"

"Upon my soul! I believe that any reasonable man would agree to it."

"Go on, then!" exclaimed Castelnau; "our despair will be so much the more to be dreaded if your mission to the duke fails, as I fear it will."

"Thanks!" said Gabriel. "I have strong hopes myself that I shall succeed, and thus, with God's help, preserve all these gallant and noble lives."

He went quickly down, and caused the door leading to the courtyard to be opened; and with a flag of truce in his hand, he walked toward the Duc de Nemours, who, sitting on his horse in the midst of his troops, was awaiting the issue.

"I do not know whether Monseigneur recognizes me," said Gabriel to the duke; "but I am the Comte de Montgomery."

"Yes, Monsieur de Montgomery, I do recognize you," replied Jacques de Savoie. "Monsieur de Guise advised me that I should find you here, but said that you had his permission, and charged me to treat you as a friend."

"A precaution which may be of ill service to me with other less fortunate friends," observed Gabriel, with a sorrowful shake of the head. "However, Monseigneur, may I venture to beg a moment's conversation with you?"

"I am at your service," said Monsieur de Nemours.

Castelnau, who was following distractedly all the movements of the duke and Gabriel from a grated window of the château, saw them draw aside from the rest,

and converse for some moments with much animation. Then Jacques de Savoie called for writing materials, and using a drumhead for a table, wrote a few rapid lines, which he handed to Gabriel, who seemed to be profuse in his thanks.

"There must be some hope for us," thought Castelnau. Gabriel rushed headlong back into the château, and a moment later, breathless and without a word, placed the following document in Castelnau's hands : —

Monsieur de Castelnau and his companions now within the Château de Noizai having agreed upon my arrival to lay down their arms and surrender to me, I, the undersigned, Jacques de Savoie, have sworn upon my princely faith, upon my honor, and as I hope for the salvation of my soul, that they shall not be molested, but shall be set at liberty entirely unharmed, fifteen of them only, including Monsieur de Castelnau, to go with me to Amboise, to present their grievances to the king in a peaceable manner.

Given at the Château de Noizai this 16th of March, 1560.

JACQUES DE SAVOIE.

"Thanks, my friend," Castelnau said to Gabriel, after he had read the foregoing ; "you have saved our lives, and our honor, which is dearer than life. On these conditions I am ready to follow Monsieur de Nemours to Amboise ; for we shall not appear there as prisoners before their conqueror, but as oppressed subjects before their king. Once more I thank you."

But as he warmly clasped the hand of his preserver, Castelnau remarked that Gabriel had relapsed into his former state of melancholy.

"What troubles you now, pray ?" he asked.

"I am thinking now about La Renaudie and the other Protestants who were to attack Amboise to-night," re-

plied Gabriel. "Alas! I fear it is too late to save them; but I will at least make the attempt. La Renaudie was to advance by the forest of Château-Regnault, was he not?"

"Yes," said Castelnau, earnestly; "and there is yet time for you to find him there, and save him as you have saved us."

"At all events, I will do my best," said Gabriel. "The Duc de Nemours will leave me at liberty, I think. Adieu, then, dear friend; I go to continue, if possible, my work of conciliation. *Au revoir!* — at Amboise."

"*Au revoir!*" Castelnau replied.

As Gabriel had anticipated, the Duc de Nemours made no opposition to his leaving Noizai and its detachment of royal troops.

The zealous, devoted youth was free to urge his horse in the direction of the forest of Château-Regnault.

Castelnau and those who remained with him followed Jacques de Savoie to Amboise, trusting and tranquil.

But upon their arrival they were at once lodged in prison. There they were to remain, so they were informed, until the affray was at an end, and there was no longer any danger to be apprehended in allowing them access to the king.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE FOREST OF CHÂTEAU-REGNAULT.

THE forest of Château-Regnault was fortunately only about a league and a half distant from Noizai. Gabriel urged his horse thither at a gallop; but after he had reached the spot, he rode about in every direction for more than an hour without falling in with any party, either of friends or foes.

At last he thought he distinguished the regular gallop of cavalry beyond a bend in the path he was pursuing; but they could not be Huguenots, for they were laughing and talking, while the Huguenots were too vitally concerned to conceal their movements not to preserve most complete silence.

"No matter!" thought Gabriel; and he hurried on, and soon came upon the red scarfs of the king's troops.

As he made his way toward their leader he recognized him, and was recognized by him.

It was Baron de Pardaillan, — a gallant young officer who had made the Italian campaign with him under Monsieur de Guise.

"Ah, it is the Comte de Montgommery!" cried Pardaillan. "I thought you were at Noizai, Count."

"I have just come from there," said Gabriel.

"Well, what has occurred there? — ride by my side awhile and tell me."

Gabriel told the story of the sudden arrival of the Duc de Nemours, of his carrying the terrace and the draw-

bridge, of his own mediation between the parties, and the peaceful submission which had been its happy result.

"*Pardieu!*" exclaimed Pardaillan; "Monsieur de Nemours was in luck, and I should be glad to be equally fortunate myself. Do you know, Monsieur de Montgommery, against whom my own movements are directed at this moment?"

"La Renaudie, doubtless."

"Precisely. And do you know what La Renaudie is to me?"

"Why, your cousin, I believe, — yes, I remember."

"Yes, he is my cousin," Pardaillan said; "and more than that, he is my friend and my comrade-in-arms. Ah, do you know how bitter a thing it is to fight against one who has so often fought at one's side?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Gabriel; "but you are not sure of meeting him, are you?"

"Alas! I am only too sure!" returned Pardaillan. "My instructions are exact; and the reports of those who have betrayed him are only too accurate. See! after marching another fifteen minutes I shall find myself face to face with La Renaudie in the second path to the left."

"But suppose you were to avoid that path?" whispered Gabriel.

"I should be false to my honor and to my duty as a soldier," was Pardaillan's reply. "Besides, it is better that I should not be able to do it. My two lieutenants received Monsieur de Guise's orders as well as myself, and they would interfere to prevent my running counter to them. No; my only hope is that La Renaudie will consent to surrender, and a faint hope it is; for he is as proud as Lucifer, and as brave as a lion. Moreover, he

has an opportunity to fight, and will not be taken by surprise, as Castelnau was; and again, we are not very superior to him in point of numbers. However, you will assist me, will you not, Monsieur de Montgommery, in urging him to yield?"

"Alas!" said Gabriel, with a sigh, "I will do my best."

"The Devil take these civil wars!" cried Pardaillan, in conclusion.

They rode along in silence for almost ten minutes.

When they had taken the second path to the left, Pardaillan said, —

"Now we should be approaching them. How my heart beats! For the first time in my life, I believe, as God hears me, that I am afraid."

The royal troops were no longer laughing and talking, but advanced slowly and cautiously.

They had not gone two hundred paces, when they thought they could see through a thicket of trees the glistening of weapons upon a path, which ran parallel with the main road.

Their uncertainty was not of long duration, for almost immediately a firm voice cried out, —

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"It is La Renaudie's voice," Pardaillan said to Gabriel. Then he replied to the challenge, —

"Valois and Lorraine!"

Instantly, La Renaudie on horseback, followed by his little band, debouched from the bypath.

However, he ordered his troops to halt, and rode forward a few steps alone.

Pardaillan imitated him by crying to his people, "Halt!" and riding toward him accompanied only by Gabriel.

One would have said they were two friends in haste to meet after a long separation, rather than two foes ready to meet in deadly conflict.

"I should have already replied to you as I ought," said La Renaudie, as he approached, "if I had not thought that I recognized the voice of a friend. Unless I am greatly mistaken, that visor conceals the features of my dear Pardaillan."

"Yes, it is I, my poor La Renaudie," replied Pardaillan; "and if I may give you a brother's advice, it is to abandon your enterprise, dear friend, and lay down your arms at once."

"Oh, yes! that is indeed brotherly advice!" retorted La Renaudie, ironically.

"Yes, Monsieur de la Renaudie," interposed Gabriel, coming forward, "it is the advice of a loyal friend, I bear you witness. Castelnau surrendered to the Duc de Nemours this morning; and if you do not follow his example, you are lost."

"Aha, Monsieur de Montgommery!" exclaimed La Renaudie, "are you with these fellows?"

"I am neither with them nor with yourself," said Gabriel, in a grave and melancholy tone. "I stand between you."

"Oh, forgive me, Monsieur le Comte," added La Renaudie, deeply moved by the noble and dignified bearing of Gabriel. "I had no wish to wound you, and I think I would doubt my own loyalty rather than yours."

"Pray believe me, then," said Gabriel, "and do not hazard a useless and disastrous conflict. Surrender."

"Impossible!" replied La Renaudie.

"But reflect, I beg you," said Pardaillan, "that we are no more than a feeble advance-guard."

"For Heaven's sake," retorted the Protestant leader, "do you suppose that my whole force consists of this handful of gallant fellows whom you see?"

"I warn you," said Pardaillan, "that you have traitors in your ranks."

"Well, they are in yours now," returned La Renaudie.

"I will undertake to obtain your pardon from Monsieur de Guise," cried Pardaillan, who knew not which way to turn.

"My pardon!" exclaimed La Renaudie; "I hope to be more concerned with granting than receiving pardons!"

"Oh, La Renaudie! La Renaudie! Surely you do not wish to compel me to draw my sword against you, — Godefroy, my old comrade, my play-fellow?"

"We must be prepared even for that, Pardaillan; for you know me too well to believe that I am inclined to yield the field to you."

"Monsieur de la Renaudie," cried Gabriel, "once more I tell you that you are wrong."

But he was rudely interrupted.

The horsemen on both sides, remaining apart, but in full view of one another, could not understand the meaning of all this parleying between their chiefs, and were burning with eagerness to come to closer quarters.

"In God's name, what do they find to talk about at such length?" muttered the troopers of Pardaillan.

"Ah!" said the Huguenots, "do they think that we came here to watch them while they talk over their private business?"

"Wait a moment! wait!" said one of La Renaudie's band, in which every soldier was a leader, "I know a way to cut short their conversation;" and just as Gabriel



The Forest of Chateau-Regnault.

Drawn and etched by E. Van Muyden.

THE TWO DIANAS, II. 477.

began to speak, he fired a pistol-shot at the king's troops.

"You see," cried Pardaillan, sorrowfully, "your people have struck the first blow!"

"But without any order from me!" retorted La Renaudie, warmly. "However, the die is cast, and it makes no difference now. Forward, my friends, forward!"

He turned toward his men as he spoke, and Pardaillan, not to be taken by surprise, did the same, and also shouted, "Forward!"

The firing began.

Gabriel, however, remained motionless between the red and the white, the Royalists and the rebels. He scarcely even drew his horse aside, but sustained the fire of both parties.

At the first volley the plume of his helmet was cut through by a ball, and his horse killed under him.

He extricated his feet from the stirrups and stood in the same spot without a tremor, and like one dreaming in the midst of that terrible affray.

The supply of powder was soon exhausted; and the two little bands rushed forward, and continued the combat with their swords.

Gabriel, amid all the clashing and clanging, never stirred from his place, nor did he once lay his hand upon his sword; he simply stood gazing at the mad blows which were raining about him, as if he had been the image of France among her foes.

The Protestants, inferior in numbers and in discipline, began to falter.

La Renaudie in the tumult found himself face to face with Pardaillan once more.

"Engage with me!" he cried; "let me at least die by your hand."

"Ah!" said Pardaillan, "the one of us two who slays the other will be the more generous."

They crossed swords with much vigor. The blows they dealt resounded upon their coats-of-mail like hammer-strokes upon the anvil. La Renaudie circled about Pardaillan, who, sitting firmly on his saddle, parried and thrust without token of weariness. Two rivals thirsting for vengeance could not have seemed more implacable.

At last La Renaudie buried his sword in the breast of Pardaillan, who fell headlong from his horse.

But the cry which followed the fatal blow came from the lips of La Renaudie.

Happily for the victor, he had not even the time to look upon his disastrous victory, for Montigny, Pardaillan's page, levelled his arquebuse at him and fired, and he fell from his horse mortally wounded.

Nevertheless, before he expired La Renaudie yet retained strength sufficient to strike dead upon the spot, with a backward stroke of his sword, the page who had shot him.

Around these three bodies the battle waged more furiously than ever.

But the Huguenots were clearly worsted; and in a short time, being deprived of their leader, they were utterly routed.

The greater number of them were killed; but a few were taken prisoners, and some escaped.

This horrible bloody affray lasted less than ten minutes.

The royal troopers prepared to return to Amboise, and the bodies of La Renaudie and Pardaillan were placed upon the same horse.

Gabriel, who, despite his eager longing, and spared without doubt by both sides, had not received a scratch, gazed mournfully at the two lifeless bodies in which, but

a few moments before, had beat the two noblest hearts he had ever known.

"Which of the two was the braver?" he asked himself. "Which better loved the other? Which is the greater loss to his unhappy country?"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A GLIMPSE AT THE POLITICS OF THE SIXTEENTH
CENTURY.

EVEN after the surrender of the Château de Noizai, and the skirmish in the forest of Château-Regnault, the whole affair was not at an end.

The majority of the conspirators of Nantes had not been notified of these two repulses which their party had met with, and were still on their way to Amboise, prepared to assault the place that night.

But we know that thanks to the precise information furnished by Lignières, they were expected.

The youthful king had no inclination to retire, but walked anxiously, with feverish tread, up and down the vast unfurnished hall which had been set apart for his accommodation.

Mary Stuart, the Duc de Guise, and the Cardinal de Lorraine were also watching and waiting with him.

"What an everlasting night!" ejaculated François. "I am in agony; my head is on fire; and those intolerable pains in my ear are beginning to torment me again. What a night! Oh, what a night!"

"Poor dear Sire!" said Mary, soothingly, "do not excite yourself so, I pray; you only increase your bodily and mental anguish as well. Take a few moments' rest, in pity's name!"

"What! how can I rest, Mary?" said the king, — "how can I keep calm when my people are rebelling, and are in

arms against me? Ah, all this trouble will surely shorten the small portion of life God has granted me!"

Mary replied only by the tears which streamed down her lovely face.

"Your Majesty ought not to be so deeply affected," said Le Balafre. "I have already had the honor to assure you that our measures were taken, and that victory is beyond peradventure. I give you my personal guaranty of it, Sire."

"Have we not begun well, Sire?" added the Cardinal de Lorraine. "Castelnau a prisoner, and La Renaudie slain, — are these not happy omens for the issue of this affair?"

"Happy omens indeed!" said Francois, bitterly.

"To-morrow everything will be at an end," continued the cardinal; "the other leaders of the rebels will be in our power, and we can terrify, by force of a frightful example, those who might venture to try to emulate them. It must be done, Sire," said he, replying to the king's involuntary movement of horror. "A solemn 'Act of Faith,' as they say in Spain, is essential for the outraged glory of the Catholic religion, and the threatened security of the throne. To begin with, Castelnau must die. Monsieur de Nemours took it upon himself to swear that he should be spared; but that is not our affair, and we have promised nothing ourselves. La Renaudie has escaped punishment by death; but I have already given orders that at daybreak to-morrow his head be exposed upon the bridge of Amboise with this inscription: 'Leader of the rebels.'"

"Leader of the rebels!" echoed the king; "why, you yourself say that he was not the leader, and that the confessions and the correspondence of the conspirators point to the Prince de Condé alone as the real prime mover of the undertaking."

"In Heaven's name, speak not so loud, Sire, I implore you!" the cardinal exclaimed. "Yes, it is true, the prince has led and directed the whole affair, but from afar. These rascals call him the 'Silent Captain;' and he was to unmask himself after their first success. But failing that first success, he has not unmasked himself, nor will he do so. Therefore let us not drive him to that perilous extremity. Let us not seem to recognize in him the mighty head and front of the rebellion. Let us pretend not to see it, so that we may incur no risk of showing our feeling."

"Nevertheless, Monsieur de Condé is the real arch-rebel!" said François, whose youthful impatience was little in sympathy with all these "governmental fictions," as they came to be called at a later day.

"Very true, Sire," said Le Balafré; "but the prince, far from avowing his schemes, denies them. Let us pretend to believe his word. He came to-day to shut himself up here in Amboise, where he has been kept in sight, just as he has conspired, from a safe distance. Let us feign to accept him as an ally, which will be less hazardous than to have him for an avowed enemy. The prince, in fact, will assist us, if need be, to repel his own accomplices to-night, and be present at their execution to-morrow. Does he not thereby undergo a penalty a thousand times more grievous than any which is imposed upon us?"

"Yes, indeed he does," replied the king; "but will he do that; and if he does, can it be possible that he is guilty?"

"Sire," said the cardinal, "we have in our hands, and will deliver to your Majesty, if you desire, irrefragable proof of Monsieur de Condé's secret complicity. But the more flagrant and undeniable these proofs are, the more necessary is it for us to dissimulate; and, for my part, I

deeply regret certain words which I have let fall, and which, if reported to the prince, might offend him."

"What, you fear to *offend* a culprit such as you say he is !" cried François. "But what is all this uproar without, in God's name? Can it be the rebels already?"

"I will go and see," said the Duc de Guise.

But before he had crossed the threshold, Richelieu, the captain of arquebusiers, entered, and said hastily to the king, —

"Pardon, Sire, but Monsieur de Condé thinks he overheard certain words reflecting upon his honor, and he urgently demands the privilege of clearing himself from these insulting suspicions in your Majesty's presence, once for all."

The king might have refused to see the prince; but the Duc de Guise had already made a sign. Captain Richelieu's arquebusiers stepped aside, and Monsieur de Condé entered, with head erect and cheeks flushed.

He was followed by a few nobles, and a number of canons of St. Florentin, regular attachés of the Château d'Amboise, whom the cardinal had transformed into soldiers that night to assist in the defence, and who, as was frequently the case in those days, carried the arquebuse with the rosary, and wore the helmet under their cowl.

"Sire, I trust you will pardon my boldness," said the prince, after saluting the king; "but it is perhaps justified in advance by the insolence of certain charges, which are made, it seems, in the dark by my foes against my loyalty, and which I feel called upon to bring forth into the light that I may confound and chastise them."

"To what do you refer, my cousin?" asked the king, gravely.

"Sire," replied Condé, "they dare to say that I am the real leader of the rebels, whose foolhardy and impious

undertaking is at this moment throwing the realm into confusion, and filling your Majesty's heart with dismay."

"Ah, they say that, do they?" returned François. "Who says it, pray?"

"I succeeded just now in surprising these hateful slanders, Sire, upon the lips of these reverend brothers of St. Florentin, who, believing doubtless that they were among friends, did not scruple to repeat aloud what had been whispered in their ears."

"Do you mean to accuse those who repeated the offensive words, or those who whispered them in the first place?" asked François.

"Both, Sire," replied Condé, "but especially the instigators of these foul and cowardly calumnies."

As he said these words, he turned his gaze full upon the face of the Cardinal de Lorraine, who did his best to hide his embarrassed countenance behind his brother.

"Very well, my good cousin," replied the king, "you have our permission to disprove the slander, and to accuse the slanderers. Proceed."

"To disprove the slander, Sire?" repeated the prince. "Ah, will not my actions do that better than any words of mine? Did I not come at the first summons to this château, to take my place among your Majesty's defenders? Is that the act of a guilty man, Sire?—I put the question to yourself, Sire?"

"Then proceed to accuse the slanderers," said François, who chose to make no more direct reply.

"I will do so, not in words, but by deeds, Sire," said Monsieur de Condé. "They must, if they have the courage, themselves accuse me in the light of day. I here cast down my glove to them before God and the king. Let the man, of whatever rank or quality he may be, who dares to affirm that I am the author of this conspiracy

come forward! I offer to do battle with him when and where he chooses; and if in any point he be not upon a level with me, I agree to make myself his equal in every way for this combat."

The Prince de Condé, as he ceased to speak, threw his glove at his feet. His glance had not ceased to form an eloquent commentary upon his challenge, and had fixed itself proudly upon the Duc de Guise, who did not move a muscle.

There was a moment of silence, — every one reflecting, no doubt, upon this extraordinary spectacle of the lie given by a prince of the blood to the whole court, where there was not a page who did not know him to be guilty twenty times over of that offence from which he defended himself with such well-simulated indignation.

And, in truth, the youthful king was probably the only one who was innocent enough to be astonished; and no one thought any the worse of the prince's valor or virtue.

The political theories of the Italian courts, brought into France by Catherine de Médicis and her Florentines, were then fashionable in France. He who was most skilful in deceit was considered the most clever; and to conceal one's thoughts and disguise one's purpose was the acme of political skill. Frankness would have been looked upon as folly.

The noblest and purest characters of the time — Coligny, Condé, the Chancellor Olivier — had not succeeded in keeping clear of the contagion.

Therefore the Duc de Guise did not despise the Prince de Condé; he rather admired him. But he said to himself, smiling, that he was at least as good an actor as the other. Taking a step forward, he slowly removed his glove, and cast it beside that of the prince.

There was a murmur of surprise ; and the first impression was that he proposed to answer Monsieur de Condé's defiant challenge.

But in that case he would not have been the subtle politician he prided himself on being.

In a loud, firm voice, and as if really convinced by the prince's demeanor, he said, —

"I approve Monsieur le Prince de Condé's words, and support him in them ; and I am so devotedly his humble servant, having the honor to be his kinsman, that I here offer myself as his second, and will assist him in his just defence against all comers."

Le Balafré, with these words, let his inquiring glance rove boldly upon all those who stood around.

The Prince de Condé could only lower his own. He felt himself more thoroughly worsted than if he had been overthrown in the lists.

"Will no one," continued the Duc de Guise, "take up either the Prince de Condé's glove or mine?"

No one stirred, of course.

"My cousin," observed François II., with a melancholy smile, "you are, as you desired, thoroughly cleared of all suspicion of felony, in my opinion."

"Yes, Sire," said the "Silent Captain," with ingenuous impudence ; "and I thank your Majesty for having assisted me."

He turned with an effort to Le Balafré, and added, —

"I also am grateful to my good ally and kinsman, Monsieur de Guise. I hope to prove afresh to him, and to all others, by my behavior to-night against the rebels, if there be an attack, that he was not wrong in taking my part."

Thereupon the Prince de Condé and the Duc de Guise exchanged most profoundly courteous salutations.

Then the prince, being well and duly justified, and having no further business there, bowed to the king, and left the room, followed by those who had come in with him.

None were left in the royal apartment but the four personages whose dreary waiting had been enlivened and their apprehension distracted for a moment by this singular comedy.

It was a chivalrous scene, peculiar to the politics of the sixteenth century.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE TUMULT OF AMBOISE.

AFTER the departure of the Prince de Condé, neither the king nor Mary Stuart nor the brothers De Lorraine referred to what had just taken place. They seemed to avoid the dangerous subject by tacit understanding.

Minutes and hours passed away in the gloomy and restless silence of expectation.

François II. often passed his hand across his burning brow ; while Mary, seated apart, gazed sorrowfully at the pale, thin face of her young spouse, and furtively brushed away a tear from time to time. The Cardinal de Lorraine was wholly intent upon the sounds to be heard without ; while Le Balafre, whose dispositions were all made, and whose rank, as well as his office, obliged him to stay by the king's side, seemed to chafe bitterly at his forced inaction, and every now and then quivered with impatience and stamped upon the floor, as a fiery war-horse chafes at the rein which restrains him.

However, the night drew to a close ; the bell of the château, followed by that on St. Florentin, struck six, then half after six. The day began to break ; and there had been no sign of an assault, no alarm given by the sentinels.

" Well," said the king, with a sigh of relief, " I begin to believe, Monsieur le Cardinal, that Lignières has misled your Eminence, or else that the Huguenots have changed their minds."

"So much the worse if they have," replied Charles de Lorraine, "for we are sure to put down the rebellion."

"Oh, no! so much the better!" exclaimed François; "for the contest of itself would be a humiliation for royalty —"

But his sentence was yet unfinished when two shots of an arquebuse, the signal which had been agreed upon as an alarm, were fired, and the shout was heard, repeated from post to post along the ramparts, —

"To arms! to arms! to arms!"

"There can be no doubt that the enemy are upon us!" cried the cardinal, turning pale in spite of himself.

The Duc de Guise rose, apparently well content, and said simply as he saluted the king, "Sire, I shall soon be with you again," and went hurriedly from the room.

His powerful voice could be plainly heard, giving orders in the antechamber, when there was a second volley of arquebuses.

"You see, Sire," said the cardinal, perhaps to put his fear to shame with the sound of his voice, — "you see that Lignières was well informed, and only made an error of a few hours."

But the king heard him not; angrily biting his colorless lips, he had ears only for the ever-growing noise of artillery and arquebuses.

"Even yet I can hardly believe in the possibility of such audacity!" he muttered. "Such an outrage upon the crown —"

"Can only result in shame and abasement for the wretches, Sire," rejoined the cardinal.

"Alas!" returned the king, "if we may judge by the noise they make, the Protestants are present in large force, and are scarcely afraid."

"This disturbance will be quenched at once like a fire of straw," said Charles de Lorraine.

"It does n't seem so, for the noise is coming nearer," replied François; "and the fire instead of being quenched is blazing brighter, I think."

"Holy Virgin!" cried Mary Stuart, in terror; "do you hear the bullets ringing against the walls?"

"Yet it seems to me, Madame —" stammered the cardinal. "I think, your Majesty — As for me, I cannot see that the uproar increases any."

But his words were drowned by a fearful explosion.

"There is your answer," retorted the king, smiling bitterly, "even if your pale and terrified face were not enough to contradict you."

"I can detect the odor of powder," cried Mary. "And oh, just hear those piercing shrieks!"

"Better and better!" exclaimed François. "Come, come! The Reformers have carried the walls of the town by this time, doubtless, and propose to besiege us in the château in regular form."

"But, Sire," the cardinal stammered, shaking like a leaf, "in this conjuncture would it not be better for your Majesty to withdraw to the donjon? We may be sure that they will not carry that at all events."

"Who, — I?" cried the king; "hide myself from my own subjects! from heretics! Let them come even as far as this, my good uncle, — I shall be very glad to know to what point they will carry their insolence. You will hear them beg us to sing a psalm or two with them in French, and to turn our chapel of St. Florentin into a meeting-house."

"Sire, for Heaven's sake, think a little of what is prudent," said Mary.

"No," replied the king, "I propose to see this matter

through to the bitter end. I will await these faithful subjects on this spot ; and by my royal name ! let one of them but fail to show me the respect that is my due, and he shall learn whether this dagger hangs at my side for show only !”

The minutes rolled on, and the arquebuse-firing grew more and more brisk. The poor cardinal could no longer utter a word, and the king was wringing his hands in helpless wrath.

“In God’s name,” exclaimed Mary, “will no one come to give us news ? Is the danger so pressing that no one can leave his place for an instant ?”

“Ah !” said the king, quite beside himself with excitement, “this waiting is intolerable, and anything else would be preferable to it, I think ! I know one way of ascertaining what is going on, and that is to go to the scene of the affray myself. Monsieur le Lieutenant-Général cannot refuse to receive me as a volunteer.”

François took two or three steps toward the door, but Mary threw herself in front of him.

“Sire,” she cried, “consider ! Ill as you are !”

“I no longer feel my pain,” said the king. “Indignation has taken the place of suffering.”

“Wait yet a moment, Sire !” urged the cardinal. “I am sure that the uproar is really growing fainter now. Yes, the reports are much less frequent. Ah ! here is a page, with news, no doubt.”

“Sire,” said the page, “I am instructed by Monsieur le Duc de Guise to say to your Majesty that the Protestants have given way and are in full retreat.”

“At last ! That is happy news !” cried the king.

“As soon as Monsieur le Lieutenant-Général thinks that he can safely leave the walls,” continued the page, “he will hasten to make his report to the king.”

The page thereupon left the room.

"Well, Sire," observed the Cardinal de Lorraine, triumphantly, "was I not right in predicting that it would be mere child's play, and that Monsieur my illustrious and gallant brother would soon give a good account of these singers of hymns?"

"Oh, my dear uncle," François retorted ironically, "how suddenly your courage has returned!"

As he spoke, a second explosion was heard, much louder and more awful than the first.

"What can that noise mean?" said the king.

"In truth, it is strange," the cardinal replied, beginning to tremble afresh.

Fortunately his alarm did not last long. Richelieu, the captain of arquebusiers, came in almost immediately with his face begrimed with powder, and a bloody sword in his hand.

"Sire," Richelieu thus addressed the king, "the rebels are utterly routed. They scarcely had time to explode a quantity of powder which they had deposited near one of the gates, and which inflicted no damage on us. Those who were not taken or slain recrossed the bridge and have barricaded themselves in one of the houses in the Faubourg du Vendômois, where we shall have an easy prey. Your Majesty may see from this window how we will treat them."

The king ran quickly to the window, followed by the cardinal, and more slowly by the queen.

"Yes, indeed," said he, "there they are, having their turn at being besieged. But what is this I see? What is all the smoke pouring from the house?"

"Sire, it has been set on fire," said the captain.

"Very good! marvellously well done!" ejaculated the cardinal. "Look, Sire, see them leaping from the win-

dow! Two, three, four, — more, more! Do you hear their shrieks?"

"Oh, God! the poor wretches!" cried Mary Stuart, clasping her hands.

"It seems to me," observed the king, "that I can distinguish at the head of our troops the plume and scarf of our cousin De Condé. Is it really he, Captain?"

"Yes, your Majesty," replied Richelieu. "He has been among us all the time, sword in hand, fighting beside Monsieur de Guise."

"Well, Monsieur le Cardinal," said François, "you see that he did not wait to be asked."

"He could not have afforded to, Sire!" replied Charles de Lorraine. "Monsieur le Prince would have risked too much if he had acted otherwise than he has."

"Oh, see!" cried Mary, repelled and fascinated at once by the horrible spectacle without; "the flames are much more intense! the house will fall in upon the poor wretches!"

"It has fallen!" said the king.

"Thank God, it is all over!" cried the cardinal.

"Ah, let us leave the place, Sire; it makes me ill," said Mary, drawing the king away from the window.

"Yes," said François, "I can feel nought but pity now."

He left the cardinal standing alone at the window in great exultation; but he soon turned away too, as he heard the voice of the Duc de Guise.

Le Balafré entered, proud and unmoved, accompanied by the Prince de Condé, who, for his part, had much ado to hide his grief and shame.

"Sire, it is all over," said the Duc de Guise to the king; "and the rebels have paid the penalty of their crime. I render thanks to God, who has delivered your

Majesty from this peril; for from what I have seen, I conclude it was greater than I supposed. We have traitors among us."

"Can it be?" cried the cardinal.

"Yes," replied Le Balafré; "when they made their first assault, they were seconded by the men-at-arms who came hither with Lamotte. They attacked us in flank, and for a moment were masters of the town."

"That is terrible!" said Mary, pressing close to the king.

"It would have been much more so, Madame," continued the duke, "if the rebels had also been seconded, as they hoped to be, by an attack which Chaudieu, brother of the minister, was to make upon the *Porte des Bons Hommes*."

"Did the attack fail?" asked the king.

"It did not take place, Sire. Captain Chaudieu, thank Heaven! was delayed, and will arrive only to find his friends annihilated. Now let him come at his leisure! he will find everything ready for him both within and without the walls. And, to give him food for reflection, I have ordered that twenty or thirty of his accomplices should be hanged on top of the battlements of Amboise. The spectacle will prove a sufficient warning to him, I fancy."

"That was well thought of!" said the cardinal.

"I thank you, my cousin," said the king to Le Balafré; "but I see that God's merciful protection has been most bountifully shown in this affair, since to Him alone we must attribute the confusion that prevailed in the counsels of our enemies. Let us in the first place, then, repair to the chapel to return thanks to Him."

"After that," said the cardinal, "we will issue orders for the punishment of the surviving culprits. Sire, you

will be present at their execution with the queen and queen-mother, will you not?"

"Why, will that be necessary, pray?" asked the youthful king, walking toward the door, much annoyed.

"Sire, it is indispensable," urged the cardinal, following him. "The glorious King François I. and your father, of illustrious memory, Sire, never failed to be present at the burning of heretics. As for the King of Spain, Sire —"

"Other kings may do as they please," said François, still going toward the door, "and I, too, propose to have my own way."

"I ought to inform your Majesty that the nuncio from his Holiness absolutely relies upon your presence at the first 'Act of Faith' of your reign," added the pitiless cardinal. "When everybody else is present, — even the Prince de Condé, I venture to say, — is it fitting that your Majesty should be absent?"

"Alas, *mon Dieu!* we will talk of this matter again presently," rejoined François. "The guilty men are not yet condemned."

"Oh, I beg your Majesty's pardon, but they are!" said the cardinal, earnestly.

"So be it! Thus you impose this terrible necessity upon me in my feebleness," replied the king. "But now, Monsieur le Cardinal, let us go, as I said, to kneel before the altar and thank God, who has deigned to turn aside from us the peril of this conspiracy."

"Sire," said the Duc de Guise, "we must not exaggerate these things, and give them more importance than they deserve. Therefore I trust that your Majesty will not speak of this movement as a conspiracy; it was, in truth, nought but a *tumult*."

CHAPTER L.

AN ACT OF FAITH.

ALTHOUGH the conspirators had inserted in a manifesto, seized among La Renaudie's papers, a declaration that they would "attempt nothing against the king's majesty, nor the princes of the blood, nor the good of the kingdom," they had, nevertheless, been taken in open rebellion, and might well expect to meet the fate of those who are vanquished in civil wars.

The mode of treatment that had been adopted with regard to those who professed the principles of the Reformation, while they were conducting themselves as peaceful and submissive subjects, left little room for hope of pardon now.

In fact, the Cardinal de Lorraine hurried on their condemnation with a passionate zeal that was quite characteristic of the ecclesiastic of those days, though it was hardly Christlike.

He intrusted the proceedings against the nobles who were implicated in the deplorable affair to the parliament of Paris and the Chancellor Olivier. Thus matters progressed finely. The interrogations were quickly gone through, and the sentences pronounced still more quickly.

They dispensed with even these empty formalities in the cases of the less highly placed abettors of the rebellion, people of small importance, who were being broken on the wheel or hanged every day at Amboise without

wearrying parliament with their cases. The honor and expense of a trial were only accorded to persons of some quality or note.

At last, thanks to the pious ardor of Charles de Lorraine, everything was concluded in their cases as well in less than three weeks.

The 15th of April was fixed for the public execution at Amboise of twenty-seven barons, eleven counts, and seven marquises ; in all, fifty gentlemen, leaders of the Protestants, were to meet their death that day.

Nothing was neglected which could assist in imparting to that extraordinary religious function all desirable pomp and splendor. Extensive preparations were made. From Paris to Nantes public curiosity was inflamed by all the expedients in vogue at that time ; that is to say, the execution was announced by all preachers and curés from their pulpits.

On the appointed day, three superb galleries, the central and most sumptuous of which was reserved for the royal family, were erected on the platform of the château at the foot of which the bloody drama was to be enacted.

Around the square were wooden benches filled with all the faithful from the neighborhood who could be got together, willingly or on compulsion. The bourgeoisie and peasants, who might have had some distaste for such a grewsome spectacle, were induced to go either by threats or bribes ; some had their taxes remitted ; others were threatened with the loss of their offices or their privileges as freemen. All these divers motives, added to the morbid curiosity of some and the fanaticism of others, caused such a concourse of people at Amboise that more than ten thousand were encamped in the fields the night before the fatal day.

Early in the morning of the 15th the roofs of all the

houses in the town were covered with a moving mass ; and windows looking upon the square were let for ten crowns, — which was an enormous price for the time.

A vast scaffold, draped in black cloth, was erected in the middle of the enclosure. On it was to be seen the *chouquet*, — a block upon which each of the condemned had to rest his head while he knelt to receive the blow. Near by a chair draped in black was reserved for the clerk, whose duty it was to call the names of the gentlemen one by one, and read aloud the sentence of each in succession.

The square was guarded by the Scotch company and the gendarmes of the royal household.

After solemn Mass in the chapel of St. Florentin, the condemned men were led to the foot of the scaffold. Several of them had already been subjected to the torture. They were surrounded by monks, who tried to make them renounce their heretical principles ; but not one of the Huguenots consented thus to apostatize before death, and they steadfastly refused to reply to the monks, whom they suspected of being spies of the Cardinal de Lorraine.

Meanwhile the galleries reserved for the court were filled, except the one in the centre. The king and queen, whose consent to be present at the execution had almost to be torn from them by force, had at last succeeded in obtaining leave to postpone their attendance till toward the end, when only the principal chiefs remained to be punished. If they would but come at some time, that was all the cardinal asked. Poor royal children ! Poor crowned slaves ! They, as well as the peasants, had been prevailed upon by arousing their fear for their offices and privileges.

At noon the execution began.

When the first of the condemned men mounted the steps of the scaffold, his companions thundered out a French psalm, translated by Clément Marot, as much to afford him on whom the punishment was about to fall some last consolation as to mark their own constancy in the face of their enemies and their doom.

Therefore they sang at the foot of the scaffold, —

“ Dieu nous soit doux et favorable,
 Nous bénissant par sa bonté,
 Et de son visage adorable
 Nous fasse luire sa clarté.” ¹

A verse was sung for every head as it fell ; but every head that fell made one voice less in the chorus.

In an hour but twelve gentlemen remained, and they the most prominent leaders of the conspiracy.

Then there was a pause. The two executioners were weary, and the king was arriving.

François II. was more than pale ; he was absolutely livid. Mary Stuart took her place at his right, and Catherine de Médicis at his left.

The Cardinal de Lorraine took his place beside the queen-mother ; and the Prince de Condé was shown to a seat beside the young queen.

When the prince appeared upon the platform, almost as pale as the young king himself, the twelve condemned men saluted him.

He gravely responded to their salutation.

“ I always bow in the presence of death,” he remarked aloud.

¹ “ O Lord, to us be merciful,
 And bless us with Thy grace,
 And show unto our humble hearts
 The brightness of Thy face.”

The king was received, however, with less respect than the Prince de Condé. No acclamation welcomed him upon his arrival. He noticed the omission, and turning to the cardinal, he said, with an angry frown, —

“Ah, Monsieur le Cardinal, I will never forgive you for forcing us to come hither!”

Charles de Lorraine, however, had raised his hand as a signal for the marks of devotion to be manifested, and a few voices scattered through the crowd cried, —

“*Vive le roi !*”

“You hear, Sire?” rejoined the cardinal.

“Yes,” said the king, sadly; “I hear a few awkward fellows, who but serve to make the general silence more noticeable.”

Meanwhile the remainder of the royal gallery had been occupied. The king’s brothers, the papal nuncio, the Duchesse de Guise, had taken their places there one after another.

Then came the Duc de Nemours, also very pale, and looking as if he were the prey of bitter remorse.

Last of all two men took their stations there, behind the others, whose presence in that place and at that time was perhaps not less remarkable than that of the Prince de Condé.

They were Ambroise Paré and Gabriel de Montgommery.

They had been led thither by very different motives.

Ambroise Paré had been summoned to Amboise some days before by the Duc de Guise, who was decidedly alarmed concerning the health of his royal nephew; and Mary Stuart, no less alarmed than her uncle, and seeing how dejected François was at the mere thought of the *auto-da-fé*, had implored the surgeon to be at hand to assist the king in case he should faint.

Gabriel, however, had come to make one last supreme

effort to save at least one of the condemned, — the one who was to suffer last, and whom he reproached himself for having involuntarily, by his well-meant advice, led into this fatal extremity, — the young and gallant Castelnau de Chalosses.

Castelnau, we must remember, had surrendered only upon the written and subscribed assurance of the Duc de Nemours, who had guaranteed his life and liberty ; whereas, immediately upon reaching Amboise he had been cast into prison, and to-day was to be beheaded, — last of all, as being the most guilty of all.

We must, however, be just to the Duc de Nemours. When he saw his word and honor as a gentleman thus compromised, he was in despair, and indignant to the highest degree ; and for three weeks he went ceaselessly from the Cardinal de Lorraine to the Duc de Guise, and from Mary Stuart to the king, begging and demanding and imploring the release of him to whom he owed this debt of honor. But the Chancellor Olivier, to whom they referred the question, declared, according to Monsieur de Vieilleville, that “a king is in nowise bound by his word to a rebellious subject, nor by any promise whatsoever made to him on his [the king’s] behalf.” This almost broke the heart of the Duc de Nemours ; “who,” the chronicler naïvely adds, “was worried only about his signature ; for as to his word, he would always have given the lie to any one without exception who dared to upbraid him for it, save his Majesty alone, so valiant and noble-hearted a prince was he !”

Like Gabriel, the Duc de Nemours had been drawn to the place of execution — which was more terrible to him than to any other — by a secret hope of still saving Castelnau at the last moment.

Meanwhile the Duc de Guise, on horseback, with his

captains beneath the gallery, had given a signal to the executioners; and the punishments and singing of psalms began again after the brief interruption.

In less than a quarter of an hour eight heads fell. The fair young queen was almost fainting.

Only four conspirators remained at the foot of the scaffold.

The clerk read in a loud voice, —

“Albert Edmond Roger, Comte de Mazères, guilty of heresy, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and of attacking with arms in his hand the person of the king.”

“’T is false !” cried the Comte de Mazères from the scaffold.

Then, showing to the people his blackened arms and his breast all bruised by the torture, he continued : “See the condition to which I have been reduced in the king’s name ! But I know that he knows nothing of it ; and so I still cry, *Vive le roi !*”

His head fell. The last three Protestants who were awaiting their turns at the foot of the scaffold sang again the first verse of the psalm, —

“ Dieu nous soit doux et favorable,
 Nous bénissant par sa bonté,
 Et de son visage adorable
 Nous fasse luire sa clarté.”¹

The clerk’s voice was heard once more, —

“Jean Louis Alberic, Baron de Raunay, guilty of heresy, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and of attacking with arms in his hand the person of the king.”

¹ “ O Lord, to us be merciful,
 And bless us with Thy grace,
 And show unto our humble hearts
 The brightness of Thy face.”

"You lie like two clowns, you and your cardinal," said De Raunay; "it is only against him and his brother that we took up arms. I hope they may both meet death as peacefully and as pure in heart as I."

Thereupon he laid his head upon the block.

The last two condemned men sang on, —

" Dieu tu nous as mis à l'épreuve,
Et tu nous as examinés ;
Comme l'argent que l'on éprouve,
Par feu tu nous as affinés." ¹

Again the clerk resumed his deadly summons, —

"Robert Jean René Briquemaut, Comte de Villemongis, guilty of heresy, of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and of a criminal attempt against the king's person."

Villemongis bathed his hands in De Raunay's blood ; and raising them toward heaven, he cried, —

"Heavenly Father, Thou seest the blood of Thy children ! Thou wilt avenge them !"

He fell lifeless as he spoke.

Castelnau, left quite alone, still sang, —

" Tu nous as fait entrer et joindre
Aux pièges de nos ennemis ;
Tu nous as fait les reins astreindre
Des filets où tu nous as mis." ²

¹ "Thou hast put us to the proof when we
To Thy guidance did aspire ;
Like gold, Thou hast refined us
By the ordeal of fire."

² "Into the snare our foes have laid
Thou, Lord, hast made us fall ;
And there, fast bound, we lie, and wait
Thy word, O Lord of all !"

The Duc de Nemours had been lavish with his gold in furtherance of his hope of saving Castelnau. The clerk and even the executioners were interested in his salvation. The first executioner said that he was exhausted; and there was a necessary interruption while the other was preparing to relieve him.

Gabriel took advantage of it to urge the duke to renewed efforts.

Jacques de Savoie thereupon leaned toward the Duchesse de Guise, with whom he was said to be on the very best terms, and whispered in her ear. The duchess had much influence over the mind of the queen.

She at once rose, as if she could not bear any more of the sad spectacle, and said loud enough for Mary to hear:

"Ah, this is too horrible for ladies! Do you see how ill the queen is? Let us go."

But the Cardinal de Lorraine gazed sternly at his sister-in-law.

"A little more firmness, Madame," said he, harshly. "Remember that you are of the blood of D'Este and the wife of the Duc de Guise."

"Ah, and that is just why I am so troubled!" retorted the duchess. "No mother ever had better cause for suffering; for all this bloodshed and all the hatred aroused by this day's work will fall upon our innocent children."

"How weak women are!" muttered the cardinal, who was an arrant coward.

"However," said the Duc de Nemours, "one does not need to be a woman to be touched by this mournful picture. Tell me, Prince," said he to Monsieur de Condé, "are not you moved by it?"

"Oh, ho!" sneered the cardinal; "the prince is a soldier, accustomed to see death in all forms."

"Yes, on the battle-field," replied the prince, courageously; "but upon the scaffold, and in cold blood,—that's quite another matter!"

"Has a prince of the blood so much pity for rebels, pray?" It was again the sneering voice of Charles de Lorraine which asked the question.

"I have unlimited pity and sympathy," retorted the prince, "for gallant officers who have always worthily served their king and country."

What more could the prince do or say in his position, himself the object of suspicion? The Duc de Nemours understood, and addressed himself next to the queen-mother.

"See, Madame, but one remains," said he, without calling Castelnau's name. "Can we not at least save him?"

"I can do nothing," replied Catherine, turning her head away.

Meanwhile the unfortunate Castelnau was ascending the steps to the scaffold, singing as he went,—

"Dieu *me* soit doux et favorable,
Me bénissant par sa bonté,
 Et de son visage adorable
Me fasse luire sa clarté."¹

The people, deeply affected, forgot the fear inspired by spies and *mouchards*, and cried as with one voice,—

"Mercy, mercy!"

The Duc de Nemours was struggling at that moment to soften the heart of the young Duc d'Orléans.

"Monseigneur," said he, "have you forgotten that it was Castelnau who, in this same town of Amboise, saved

¹ "O Lord, to *me* be merciful,
 And bless *me* with Thy grace,
 And show unto *my* humble heart
 The brightness of Thy face."

the life of the late Duc d'Orléans, when it was in great danger during an *émeute*?"

"I will do whatever my mother decides," replied the Duc d'Orléans.

"But," said the Duc de Nemours, imploringly, "if you would but address the king; a single word from you —"

"I tell you again," rejoined the young prince, dryly, "that I await my mother's commands."

"Ah, Prince!" said the Duc de Nemours, reproachfully.

He made a motion to Gabriel expressive of discouragement and despair.

Thereupon the clerk read slowly, —

"Michel Jean Louis, Baron de Castelnau-Chalosses, accused and convicted of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, of heresy, and an attack upon the king's person."

"I call my judges themselves to witness," cried Castelnau, "that the declaration is false, — unless, indeed, it be *lèse-majesté* to oppose with all my strength the tyranny of the Guises. If it is to be understood in that way, they should have begun by declaring them kings. Perhaps it will yet come to that; but it will be for those who survive me to deal with that matter."

Addressing the executioner, he said in a firm voice, —

"Now do your office."

But the headsman, who noticed some commotion in the galleries, pretended to be arranging his axe so as to gain time.

"The axe is dull, Monsieur le Baron," he said in a low voice; "and you are surely worthy to die at a single blow. And who knows but that a moment more — It seems to me that something of good omen for you is going on down below there."

Again the people cried,—

“Mercy ! mercy !”

Gabriel, losing all self-control at that supreme moment, ventured to cry aloud to Mary Stuart,—

“Mercy, Madame the Queen !”

Mary turned, met Gabriel’s heart-rending glance, and understood his despairing cry.

Bending her knee before the king, she said,—

“Sire, this mercy at least ; I ask it of you on my knees !”

“Sire,” cried the Duc de Nemours, “has not enough blood been shed ? And yet, you know, there should be mercy in the king’s countenance.”

François, trembling in every limb, seemed struck by these words. He seized the queen’s hand.

“Remember, Sire,” said the stern voice of the nuncio, who wished to recall the king to a more severe view of his duty, — “remember that you are the very Christian king.”

“Yes, I do remember it,” replied François II., firmly. “Let mercy be shown to the Baron de Castelnau !”

But the Cardinal de Lorraine, feigning to misinterpret the meaning of the king’s first phrase, had made an imperative sign to the executioner.

As François pronounced the word “mercy,” Castelnau’s head rolled upon the planks of the scaffold.

The next day the Prince de Condé set out for Navarre.

CHAPTER LI.

ANOTHER SPECIMEN OF POLITICS.

FROM the day of that fatal execution, the feeble health of François II. grew steadily worse.

Seven months later (at the end of November, 1560), the court being then at Orléans, where the States-General had been convoked by the Duc de Guise, the poor boy-king of seventeen was obliged to take to his bed.

Beside that bed of sorrow where Mary Stuart prayed and watched and wept, a most interesting drama depended for its conclusion upon the life or death of the son of Henri II.

The real question, although others were interested in its solution, lay between a pale woman and a sinister-looking man, who were seated side by side in the evening of December 4 a few steps from the sleeping invalid, and from Mary, who was weeping silently at his pillow.

The man was Charles de Lorraine, the woman Catherine de Médicis.

The revengeful queen-mother, who had at first been as one dead after the struggle which we have related at the accession of her son, had awakened during the last eight months, since the "Tumult of Amboise."

This, in brief, is what she had done in the bitterness of her hatred against the Guises : she had entered into a secret alliance with the Prince de Condé and Antoine de Bourbon ; she had effected a reconciliation secretly with

the old Constable de Montmorency. Nought but hatred can cause hatred to be forgotten.

Her new and ill-assorted friends, urged on by her, had fomented rebellion in various provinces, had aroused Dauphiné under Montbrun, and Provence under the brothers Mouvans, and had caused an attempt to be made upon Lyons by Maligny.

The Guises, on their side, were by no means asleep. They had assembled the States-General at Orléans, and had taken care to have a majority devoted to them.

Then, too, they had summoned the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé to attend the States-General, as was their right.

Catherine de Médicis sent warning after warning to the princes to dissuade them from putting themselves in their enemy's power; but their duty called them, and the Cardinal de Lorraine gave them the king's word as a pledge of their security.

Therefore they came to Orléans.

The very day of their arrival Antoine de Navarre was consigned to a certain house in the city where he was kept continually in sight, and the Prince de Condé was cast into prison.

Then an extraordinary commission issued to try the prince; and he was condemned to death at Orléans by the procurement of the Guises,—the very man whose innocence the Duc de Guise himself at Amboise had announced his willingness to answer for with his sword.

Only one or two signatures were still to be procured, which the Chancellor l'Hôpital was delaying, before the sentence would be executed.

The foregoing statement will serve to show how matters stood on the evening of the 4th of December, as regards the party of the Guises, of which Le Balafré was

the arm and the cardinal the head, and the Bourbon faction, of which Catherine de Médicis was the secret soul.

Everything depended, for both sides, upon the expiring breath of the anointed youth.

If François II. could only live a few days longer, the Prince de Condé would be executed, the King of Navarre might be accidentally slain in some altercation, and Catherine de Médicis banished to Florence. So far as the States-General were concerned, the Guises were masters, and if necessary, kings.

If, on the other hand, the young king should die before his uncles were relieved of their enemies, the struggle would begin again, with the chances against them rather than in their favor.

Therefore what Catherine de Médicis and Charles de Lorraine were waiting and watching for with such an anguish of interest on that cold night of the 4th of December, in that apartment in the city of Orléans, was not so much the life or death of their royal son and nephew as the triumph or defeat of their cause.

Mary Stuart alone watched over her young, dearly loved husband without thinking what loss his death might entail upon her.

However, we must not think that the bitter antagonism of the queen-mother and the cardinal betrayed itself to outside observers in their manners or their conversation. On the contrary, they had never seemed to be more confiding or more affectionate to each other.

At the moment at which we look in upon them, taking advantage of François's slumber, they were talking in a low voice and in the most friendly way imaginable about their most secret interests and their inmost thoughts.

For the better to conform to that Italian policy of

which we have already given specimens, Catherine had sedulously dissembled her underhand proceedings, and Charles de Lorraine had always pretended to know nothing of them.

Thus they had not ceased to converse as allies and as friends. They were like two gamblers, each of whom cheats loyally for his own side, and who openly use clogged dice against each other.

"Yes, Madame," the cardinal was saying,— "yes, that stubborn Chancellor de l'Hôpital obstinately refuses to sign the decree for the prince's death. Ah! you were indeed in the right, Madame, six months ago, to oppose his succession to Olivier so vigorously! If I had only understood you then!"

"What! is it absolutely impossible to overcome his resistance?" asked Catherine, who had in reality instructed the chancellor to resist.

"I have tried flattery and threats," Charles de Lorraine replied, "and have found him inflexible."

"Suppose Monsieur le Duc should try his hand?"

"Nothing will move that Auvergne mule," said the cardinal. "Besides, my brother has declared that he does not propose to meddle in the affair at all."

"It becomes embarrassing," remarked Catherine, secretly delighted beyond expression.

"There is one way, however," said the cardinal, "by resorting to which we can get along without all the chancellors in the world."

"Is there, indeed? What way is that?" cried the queen-mother, uneasily.

"To have the decree signed by the king."

"By the king!" echoed Catherine. "But can he do it? Has he the right?"

"Yes," replied the cardinal, "we have proceeded thus

far in this very matter by the advice of the best jurists, who have declared that the matter may be pushed forward to judgment in spite of the prince's refusal to reply."

"But what will the chancellor say?" cried Catherine, really alarmed.

"He will grumble, as he always does," replied the cardinal, calmly; "he will threaten to resign the seals."

"And if he does really carry out his threat?"

"It will be doubly advantageous, for we shall be well rid of a most inconvenient critic."

"When do you propose that this decree should be signed?" asked Catherine, after a pause.

"To-night, Madame."

"And you will cause it to be executed —?"

"To-morrow."

The queen-mother absolutely shuddered, for the blow was sudden.

"To-night! to-morrow! you do not reflect," she replied. "The king is too ill and weak, and his intellect is not clear enough to understand what you mean to ask of him."

"There is no necessity that he should understand, provided that he signs," retorted the cardinal.

"But his hand is not strong enough to hold a pen."

"It can be guided for him," taking keen delight in the alarm which he saw depicted in the expression of his dear foe.

"Listen," said Catherine, very gravely. "I must give you a warning and some good advice. My poor son's end is nearer than you think. Do you know what Chapelain, the first physician, told me? — that he did not think the king would be alive to-morrow evening, unless by a miracle."

"So much the more reason for us to hasten," said the cardinal, coldly.

"Yes," rejoined Catherine, "but if François II. is not alive to-morrow, Charles IX. reigns; and the King of Navarre will perhaps be regent. What a terrible reckoning would he demand for the infamous punishment of his brother? Would you not be in your turn tried and condemned?"

"Oh, well, Madame, he who risks nothing has nothing!" cried the cardinal, with angry warmth. "Besides, who says that Antoine de Navarre will be appointed regent? Who says that this Chapelain is not mistaken? Bah! the king is alive now!"

"Not so loud! not so loud, uncle!" said Mary Stuart, rising in fright. "You will wake the king! See! you have waked him."

"Mary, where are you?" said the feeble voice of François.

"Here, always by your side, dear Sire," replied Mary.

"Oh, how I suffer!" groaned the poor youth. "My head is as if it were on fire; and this pain in my ear is like a continual sword-thrust. Even in my sleep I have continued to suffer. Ah! all is at an end with me; all is at an end!"

"Don't say so! oh, don't say so!" replied Mary, struggling to restrain her tears.

"My memory is failing," said François. "Have I received the Holy Sacrament? I wish to do so as soon as possible."

"All your duties shall be fulfilled, dear Sire; do not be anxious about them."

"I want to see my confessor, Monsieur de Brichanteau."

"He will be with you immediately," said Mary.

"Are prayers being said for me?" asked the king.

"I have hardly ceased since the morning."

"Poor dear Mary! Where is Chapelain?"

"In the next room, ready to answer your call. Your mother and my uncle the cardinal are there also. Do you wish to see them, Sire?"

"No, no; none but you, Mary!" said the dying man. "Turn a little this way — there — so that I may at least see you once more."

"Courage!" replied Mary. "God is so kind! and I pray to Him with such a full heart."

"Oh, the pain!" moaned François. "I cannot see, and can scarcely hear. Give me your hand, Mary."

"There! rest upon me," said Mary, soothingly, supporting the small pale face of her husband upon her shoulder.

"My soul to God! my heart to thee, Mary! Forever! Alas! to die at seventeen!"

"No, no! you shall not die!" cried Mary. "What ill have we done to God on high that He should thus afflict us?"

"Do not weep, Mary," said the king. "We shall meet again above. I regret nothing in this world but you. If I could carry you with me, I should be glad to die. The journey to heaven is even more beautiful than that to Italy; and then, too, I fear that without me you will never know any joy. They will make you suffer, — you will be cold and lonely; they will kill you, my poor dear heart! It is that which afflicts me much more than death."

The king sank back upon his pillow exhausted, and maintained a dejected silence.

"But you shall not die; you shall not die, Sire!" cried Mary. "Listen, I have a great hope. One chance in which I have faith is left us."

"What do you mean?" Catherine de Médicis, drawing near in her amazement, interrupted her.

"Yes," continued Mary Stuart, "the king may yet be and shall be saved. Something within me tells me that all these physicians by whom he is surrounded and wearied to death are ignorant and blind. But there is a skilful man, learned and famous, — a man who preserved my uncle's life at Calais —"

"Master Ambroise Paré?" suggested the cardinal.

"Master Ambroise Paré!" Mary repeated. "They say that this man ought not to have the king's life in his hands, and would himself prefer not to; that he is a heretic and accursed; and that even if he would accept the responsibility of such a case, it ought not to be intrusted to him."

"That is very certain," said the queen-mother, scornfully.

"What! if I intrust it to him myself?" cried Mary. "Can a man of genius be a traitor? A great man, Madame, is always a good man."

"But," said the cardinal, "my brother has not delayed thinking of Ambroise Paré until to-day. He has already been approached."

"Yes, but who have been sent to him?" retorted Mary, — "those who took no interest in the matter, or even his enemies, perhaps. But I sent a trusted friend to him, and he will come."

"It will take some time for him to come from Paris," observed Catherine.

"He is on the way; in fact, he ought to have arrived," rejoined the young queen. "The friend of whom I spoke promised to bring him here to-day."

"Who is this mysterious friend, pray?" asked the queen-mother.

"Comte Gabriel de Montgomery, Madame."

Before Catherine had time to utter a word, Dayelle,

Mary's first lady-in-waiting, came in and said to her mistress, —

“Comte Gabriel de Montgomery is below, and awaits Madame's commands.”

“Oh, let him come in ! let him come in !” cried Mary, eagerly.

CHAPTER LII.

A RAY OF HOPE.

"ONE moment!" interposed Catherine de Médicis, in a cold, hard voice. "Before allowing that man to enter, pray wait at least until I can take my leave. If it pleases you to intrust the life of the son to him who cut short the life of the father, I, at all events, do not propose to meet the murderer of my husband again, or hear his voice. Therefore I enter my protest against his presence in this place, and withdraw at his approach."

She did, in fact, leave the room without bestowing a glance upon her dying son or giving him a mother's farewell blessing.

Was it because the detested name of Gabriel de Montgomery recalled to her mind the first outrage the late king had put upon her? It may be so; nevertheless, it is certain that she had no such horror as she pretended of the sight of Gabriel and the sound of his voice; for when she withdrew to her own apartment, which adjoined that of the king, she was careful to leave the door half open, and had no sooner closed another door which opened upon a corridor quite deserted at that late hour than she applied both eye and ear to the aperture, in order to see and hear what took place after her abrupt departure.

Gabriel appeared, ushered in by Dayelle, and knelt to kiss the hand the queen held out to him, before making a profound salutation to the cardinal.

"Well?" asked Mary Stuart, anxiously.

"Madame, I have prevailed upon Master Paré," said Gabriel. "He is below."

"Oh, thank you, thank you, my faithful friend!" cried Mary.

"Pray, Madame, is the king failing?" said Gabriel, in a low voice, casting an uneasy glance at the bed, where François II. lay without color or motion.

"Alas! he never seems to gain," replied the queen; "and I was very impatient to see you. Did Master Ambroise object seriously to coming?"

"No, Madame," replied Gabriel. "He had already been sent for, but in such a way, he told me, as to invite a refusal. He was expected to bind himself in advance, upon his life and his honor, to save the king, when he had not even seen him. He was given to understand that being himself a Protestant, he was open to the suspicion of desiring the death of a persecutor of Protestants. In short, he was treated with such insulting distrust, and such severe conditions were imposed upon him, that unless he had been utterly devoid of self-respect, to say nothing of caution, he must unavoidably have been led to hold himself aloof. He did so, to his great regret, and was not urged any further by those who had been sent to him."

"Can it be that our intentions were thus misrepresented to Master Paré?" the Cardinal de Lorraine hastily interposed. "Yet my brother and myself have sent to him two or three times, and have been always told of his obstinate refusal to come, and his extraordinary suspicions. We believed those whom we sent to seek him to be most trustworthy!"

"But were they really so, Monseigneur?" asked Gabriel. "Master Paré thinks otherwise, now that I have told him your real sentiments toward him, and the

queen's kind words. He is convinced that, unknown to you, persistent efforts have been made for some guilty purpose to keep him from the king's bedside."

"It must be so," returned Charles de Lorraine; "I recognize the queen-mother's hand in this," he muttered, "for she is deeply interested that her son should not be saved. But will she thus corrupt all those upon whose devotion we rely? This is a counterpart of the appointment of her friend L'Hôpital! How she does make sport of us!"

Mary Stuart, meanwhile, leaving the cardinal to his reflections upon what had taken place, and his anxiety as to what was to come, was saying to Gabriel, —

"Monsieur Paré did finally come with you, did he not?"

"At my first request," replied the young count.

"And he is here?"

"Awaiting only your gracious permission to enter, Madame."

"Pray let him come in at once!" cried Mary Stuart.

Gabriel de Montgomery went for a moment to the door at which he had entered, and returned with the surgeon.

Sheltered behind her door, Catherine de Médicis was still watching, more engrossed than ever.

Mary Stuart ran forward to meet Ambroise, took his hand, led him herself to the cherished patient's bedside, and said on the way, as if to cut short all complimentary salutations, —

"Thanks to you for coming, Master Paré. I relied upon your zeal to do good, even as I now rely upon your skill. Come quickly; come to the king!"

Ambroise Paré, yielding to the queen's restless impatience, without having time to utter a word, was soon

standing by the bed where François II., vanquished by suffering, so to speak, had only sufficient strength to breathe, almost imperceptibly and with a feeble, moaning sound.

The great physician stood a moment gazing at the young face, drawn and emaciated by suffering.

Then he stooped over the king, who was to him only a patient, and felt and probed the terrible swelling of the right ear with a touch as light and gentle as Mary's own.

The king instinctively recognized the touch of a physician, and yielded to it without opening his heavy eyes.

"Oh, such agony!" he moaned piteously; "such agony! Can you do nothing to relieve me?"

The light was too far away for Ambroise's purpose, and he made a sign to Gabriel to bring it nearer; but Mary seized it first, and herself held it for the surgeon while he made a long and careful examination of the seat of pain.

This silent, minute study lasted perhaps ten minutes; at the end of which Ambroise Paré rose to an erect posture again, and let the bed-curtain fall, apparently deeply absorbed in meditating upon his diagnosis.

Mary Stuart, waiting breathlessly, did not dare to ask him a question, lest she might disturb the current of his thoughts; but she scanned his features in an anguish of suspense. What would be his decision?

The famous physician sadly shook his head; and the movement seemed to the distracted queen like a sentence of death.

"Oh!" she exclaimed at last, unable to control her anxiety any longer; "pray tell me, is there no chance of saving him?"

"There is but one, Madame," replied Ambroise Paré.

"Is there even one?" cried the queen.

"Yes, Madame; and although, alas! it is not an abso-

lutely certain one, still it exists, and I should be very hopeful if —”

“If?” asked Mary.

“If the man to be saved were not the king, Madame.”

“Oh, that indeed!” cried Mary; “treat him, and save him as if he were the meanest of his subjects!”

“But suppose I fail?” demanded Ambroise; “for God alone is master. Shall I not be accused of having caused his death, being, as I am, a Huguenot? Might not such an awfully heavy responsibility unnerve me and make my hand tremble, when I should be in need of such absolute calmness and self-confidence?”

“Listen,” was Mary’s reply: “if he lives, I will bless you all my life, and if — if he dies, I will defend you to the death. Therefore make the effort! make the effort, I beg, I implore you! Since you say it is the last and only chance, for the love of God, do not let it pass, for it would be a crime!”

“You are right, Madame,” said Ambroise, “and I will try, — that is, if I am allowed; if you yourself will allow me, for I cannot conceal from you that the remedy to which I must resort is an extreme and unusual one, and, so far as appearances go, violent and dangerous.”

“Really?” said Mary, trembling like a leaf; “and is there no other?”

“No other, Madame! There is still time to employ it; in twenty-four hours at the utmost, and perhaps in twelve, it will be too late. An abscess has formed in the king’s head; and unless it is relieved and discharged by a speedy operation, it will burst upon the brain and cause death.”

“Must you therefore operate upon the king immediately?” said the cardinal. “I will not take the responsibility upon myself.”

"Ah, you see that you already begin to doubt me!" said Ambroise. "No, I must have the daylight; and besides, I need the rest of the night to think it over, to get my hand in practice, and make one or two experiments. But to-morrow morning, at nine o'clock, I will be here. Please be here then, Madame, and you, Monseigneur; I should be glad if Monsieur le Lieutenant-Général would also attend, in order that those whose devotion to the king is well tried may be present; but no others, — as few physicians as possible. I will then explain what I propose to do, and if you authorize me to proceed, with God's grace, I will try the last chance He has left us."

"And is there no danger before to-morrow?" the queen asked.

"No, Madame," said Master Paré. "But it is most essential that the king should rest quietly, and gather strength for the operation he is to undergo. I will mix with the harmless beverage I see on the table two drops of this elixir," he added, suiting the action to the word. "Let the king take this immediately, Madame, and he will at once fall into a deep, untroubled sleep. Watch him carefully, watch him yourself, if possible, to see that his sleep be not disturbed."

"Never fear! I will answer for that," replied Mary. "I will not leave his side to-night."

"That is of the utmost importance," said Ambroise. "Now I can do nothing more here, and I ask your permission to retire, Madame, — still to devote myself to the king, however, and to prepare for my great task."

"Go, good Master, go!" said Mary; "and accept in advance my thanks and blessing. Until to-morrow!"

"Until to-morrow, Madame," replied Ambrose Paré. "Be of good cheer!"

"I shall not cease to pray," said Mary. "And you also, Monsieur le Comte, once more I thank you," she continued, addressing Gabriel. "You are of those of whom Master Paré has spoken, whose devotion to the king has been put to the proof; therefore come to-morrow, I beg you, to give your illustrious friend the moral support of your presence."

"I will be here, Madame," said Gabriel, as he withdrew with the surgeon after respectfully saluting the queen and the cardinal.

"Yes, and I will be here too," said Catherine de Médicis to herself from her post of observation, — "yes, I will be here; for this Paré is quite capable of saving the king's life with his great skill, and of thus destroying his own party, as well as the prince and myself. The imbecile! But I will be here!"

CHAPTER LIII.

WELL-GUARDED SLUMBER.

CATHERINE DE MÉDICIS remained at her post for some time, although none but Mary Stuart and the cardinal were left in the king's chamber; but she neither saw nor heard anything of interest. The queen administered the sleeping-draught to François, who seemed, as Ambroise Paré had promised, to fall at once into a more peaceful slumber. Then everything was still. The cardinal, seated in his chair, was deep in thought; while Mary, on her knees, was pouring out her very soul in prayer.

The queen-mother softly withdrew to her own room to imitate the cardinal's reflective mood.

If she had remained a few moments longer, however, she would have witnessed a scene quite worthy of herself.

Mary Stuart, rising from her knees, said to the cardinal, —

“There is no reason why you should stay to watch with me, dear uncle; for I intend to remain here till the king awakes. Dayelle, the physicians, and the servants in attendance will be quite sufficient for any emergency that can arise; so that you may go and take a little rest. I will send to you if it is necessary.”

“No,” said the cardinal; “the Duc de Guise, who has been delayed by a number of pressing matters, told me that before he retired he would come to learn the latest

news of the king, and I promised to await him here. Hark! do I not hear his step now?"

"Oh, don't let him make any noise!" cried Mary, rushing to the door to warn Le Balafre.

The Duc de Guise entered, pale and excited. He saluted the queen, but in his preoccupation did not think to ask for the king's welfare; he went straight to his brother, and led him aside to a window-recess.

"Terrible news!" he began, — "a veritable thunder-stroke!"

"In Heaven's name, what is it?" asked the cardinal.

"The Constable de Montmorency has left Chantilly with fifteen hundred gentlemen," said the Duc de Guise. "The better to conceal his movements, he made a *détour* around Paris, and came from Ecouen and Corbeil to Pithiviers by the valley of Essonne. He will be at the gates of Orléans with his troop to-morrow; and I have just received warning of his coming."

"That is indeed terrible!" said the cardinal. "The old villain wishes to save his nephew's head. I will warrant that it was the queen-mother who notified him. Oh, this feeling of utter helplessness against that woman!"

"This is no time to proceed against her, but to bestir ourselves in our own interests," said Le Balafre. "What shall we do?"

"Go at once with our forces to meet the constable," replied Charles de Lorraine.

"Will you guarantee to hold Orléans when I am no longer here with my troops?"

"Alas! no, — indeed, I cannot," replied the cardinal. "All the Orléans people are disaffected, — Huguenots and Bourbons at heart. But in any event the States-General are on our side."

"And L'Hôpital against us, remember, my brother. Ah, it is a hard position! How does the king?" the duke asked finally, danger reminding him of his last resource.

"The king is in bad condition," was the cardinal's reply; "but Ambroise Paré, who has come to Orléans at the queen's request (I will explain this to you later), still hopes to save the king by a hazardous but necessary operation to-morrow morning, which may have happy results. Do not fail to be here at nine o'clock, brother, to sustain Ambroise, if need be."

"Surely I will be here," rejoined Le Balafre, "for that is our only hope. Our authority would die with François's last breath; but on the other hand, it would be a fine thing to frighten the constable, and perhaps make him retrace his steps, by sending him, by way of a welcome, the head of his handsome nephew, De Condé."

"Yes, that would be a very eloquent greeting, in my opinion," said the cardinal, reflectively.

"But this infernal L'Hôpital impedes everything!" exclaimed Le Balafre.

"If we had the king's signature upon the decree for the prince's death, instead of L'Hôpital's," suggested Charles de Lorraine, "there would be no further difficulty, brother, — am I not right? — about this execution taking place to-morrow morning before Montmorency's arrival, and before Master Paré's operation."

"That would not be strictly legal; but it would be possible," replied Le Balafre.

"Very well, then!" cried Charles de Lorraine, eagerly. "Leave me here, my brother; there is nothing more for you to do to-night, and you must need rest, for two o'clock will soon strike. You must husband your strength for to-morrow. Retire, and leave me here. I

mean to make a desperate effort myself to retrieve our fortunes."

"What is it to be?" the duke asked. "Pray, take no definite step without first consulting me, brother."

"Never fear! If I have what I want, I will wake you before daybreak to perfect our plans."

"Very well," said Le Balafré; "with this assurance I will retire, for it is true that I am exhausted. But be cautious!"

He said a few consoling words to Mary Stuart, and left the room with as little noise as possible.

Meanwhile the cardinal had seated himself at a table, and was making a copy of the decree of the commission, of which he had the original before him.

That done, he rose and walked toward the king's bed.

But Mary Stuart stood erect in front of him, and stopped him with a gesture.

"Where are you going?" said she, in a low tone, but firmly, and with signs of growing anger.

"Madame," replied the cardinal, "it is important, indispensable, that the king should sign this paper."

"What is most important, and most indispensable, is that the king should rest quietly," said Mary.

"Let me have his name at the bottom of this writing, Madame, and I will importune you no more."

"But you will awake him," retorted the queen; "and I do not choose that you shall. Besides, he is not capable of holding a pen at this moment."

"I will hold it for him," said the cardinal.

"I have told you that I will not have it!" replied Mary Stuart, authoritatively.

The cardinal stopped a moment, amazed at this obstacle, which he had never dreamed of.

Then he continued in his most insinuating tones, —

"Listen to me, Madame, — my dear niece, listen to me; I will tell you what is at stake. You understand very well that I would respect the king's repose if I were not constrained by the most urgent necessity. It is our fortune and yours, our welfare and yours, which are at stake. Understand me. This paper *must* be signed before daybreak, or we are lost! — lost, I tell you."

"That does not concern me," said Mary, calmly.

"Indeed it does! Once more I tell you, our ruin is your ruin, child that you are!"

"Even so, what does it matter to me?" the queen replied. "Do you suppose I concern myself with your ambition? My ambition is to save my beloved, to preserve his life if I can, and meanwhile to guard his priceless repose. Master Paré constituted me the guardian of the king's slumber. I forbid you to disturb it, Monsieur! Understand me! *I forbid you!* If the king dies, my royalty dies too! — it is all one to me! But as long as one breath remains in his body, I will defend it against the hateful demands of your intrigues. I have contributed more than I ought, my uncle, to the strengthening of your power and influence when my François was still well and strong; but I take your power from your hands again as soon as I have to concern myself with forcing respect to be shown to what may be the last hours of peace on earth that God will vouchsafe this poor life. The king, Master Paré said, would need tomorrow all of the little strength he has left. No one on earth, on any pretext whatsoever, shall deprive him of one moment of this refreshing slumber."

"But when the motive is such an important and urgent one?" said the cardinal.

"Upon no pretext whatever shall any one on earth awaken the king," repeated Mary, firmly.

"Ah, but it must be done!" retorted the cardinal, ashamed at last of having been so long delayed by the unaided resistance of a mere child, and she his niece. "The interests of State, Madame, are not consistent with these sentimental considerations. The king's signature is essential to me at once; and I will have it."

"You shall not have it, Monsieur le Cardinal," replied Mary.

The cardinal took a step toward the king's bedside, but again Mary Stuart faced him and barred his passage.

The queen and the minister looked in each other's eyes for an instant, each as excited and angry as the other.

"I will pass," said Charles de Lorraine, in a quick, short voice.

"Do you dare to lay your hand upon me, Monsieur?"

"My niece!"

"Your niece no longer, but your queen!"

These words were uttered in so firm, and withal dignified and queenly a tone, that the astonished cardinal recoiled.

"Yes, your queen," Mary continued; "and if you approach one step nearer, or make another motion, as if to make your way to the king, I will go to that door; I will call those who are on guard there; and though you be my uncle, though you be minister and cardinal, I, your queen, will order your arrest upon the spot, as guilty of *lèse-majesté*."

"Such a scandal!" muttered the cardinal, in affright.

"Which of us is responsible for it, Monsieur?"

The sparkling eye, the inflated nostrils, the heaving bosom of the young queen, and her whole determined bearing were a sufficient guarantee that she would carry out her threat.

And then, too, she was so lovely and so haughty, and withal so touching, that even the priest, with his heart of bronze, felt moved and beaten.

The man yielded to the child ; and the affairs of State obeyed the cry of natural affection.

“ Well ! ” said the cardinal, drawing a long breath, “ I will wait, then, until the king awakes.”

“ Thanks ! ” said Mary, resuming the gentle and melancholy demeanor which had become customary to her since the king’s illness.

“ But as soon as he awakes — ” continued Charles.

“ If he is then in condition to hear what you have to say, and do what you wish, I will interpose no further obstacle.”

The cardinal was perforce contented with this promise. He returned to his seat at the table, and Mary to her *prie-Dieu*, — he waiting, and she hoping.

The slow hours of that night of watching dragged themselves along, and François II. did not awake. The promise of Ambroise Paré was not a vain one : not for many nights had the king known such long and peaceful slumber.

From time to time he made a slight movement or uttered a feeble moan ; sometimes he pronounced a word or a name, generally Mary’s. But he would relapse at once into his deep sleep ; and the cardinal, who did not once fail to rise in haste at the least sound, would return dejectedly to his seat.

He crumpled in his hand uneasily the useless, fatal decree, which without the king’s signature might well serve for his own death-warrant.

He watched the torches gradually burn out or grow pale, as the cold December dawn whitened the windows.

At last, as eight o’clock struck, the king moved, then

opened his eyes, and called, "Mary! are you there, Mary?"

"Always at your side," replied the queen.

Charles de Lorraine rushed forward with the paper in his hand. Perhaps there was time even yet; a scaffold is soon erected.

But at that instant Catherine de Médicis re-entered the royal apartments by the door leading to her own.

"Too late!" muttered the cardinal. "Ah, fortune turns her back upon us! Now, if Ambroise does not save the king's life, we are lost indeed!"

CHAPTER LIV.

A KING'S DEATH-BED.

THE queen-mother during that night had not thrown away her time. In the first place, she had sent her creature, Cardinal de Tournon, to the King of Navarre, and had settled terms with the Bourbons in writing. Then before daybreak she had received the Chancellor l'Hôpital, and had learned from him of the expected arrival at Orléans of her ally, the constable; L'Hôpital, by her instructions, promised to be in the great hall, which was next to the king's apartments, at nine o'clock, and to have with him as many of her partisans as he could find. Last of all, she had made an appointment for half after eight with Chapelain and two or three others of the royal physicians, whose mediocre talent was the natural-born enemy of the genius of Ambroise Paré.

Having thus taken her precautions, she was the first, as we have seen, to enter the king's chamber just as he awoke. She went at once to her son's bedside, gazed at him for a few moments with bent head, like a grief-stricken mother, pressed a kiss upon his hand, which was hanging listlessly down, and wiping away a tear or two, took her seat in such a position as to have him always in sight.

She, as well as Mary Stuart, was determined from that time on to watch over that bed of suffering, for her own purposes.

The Duc de Guise entered almost immediately. After exchanging a few words with Mary, he walked toward his brother.

"Have you done nothing?" he asked.

"Alas! I have not been able to do anything," was the reply.

"Fortune is turning against us, then," said the duke. "There is a great crowd in Antoine de Navarre's antechamber this morning."

"Have you any news of De Montmorency?"

"None at all. I have tried in vain to learn something thus far. He could not have taken the most direct road, and he may be even now at the gates of the city. If Ambroise Paré is not successful in his operation, farewell to our fortune."

At this moment the physicians who had been summoned by Catherine de Médicis entered.

The queen-mother herself led them to the bedside of the king, whose suffering and groaning had begun again.

The physicians examined the royal patient, each in turn, and then retired to a corner to consult. Chapelain proposed a poultice to draw out the foreign matter; but the others declared in favor of injecting a certain medicated water into the ear.

They were just agreeing on the last-named method when Ambroise Paré entered, accompanied by Gabriel. After having examined into the king's condition, he joined his professional brethren.

Ambroise Paré, surgeon to the Duc de Guise, whose professional renown was already established, was now an authority to be reckoned with. The physicians told him what they had resolved to do.

"The remedy proposed is inadequate, I am sure," said Ambroise Paré, aloud; "but we must make haste, for the brain will be filled sooner than I thought."

"Oh, hasten, then, in Heaven's name!" cried Mary Stuart, who had overheard.

The queen-mother and the two Guises thereupon drew near the physicians, and joined their group.

"Have you any better and more speedy means than ours to suggest, Master Paré?" asked Chapelain.

"Yes," said Paré.

"What is it!"

"We must trepan the king," said Paré.

"Trepan the king!" cried the three physicians, in tones expressive of the utmost horror.

"In what does this operation consist?" asked the Duc de Guise.

"It is little known as yet, Monseigneur," replied the surgeon. "It consists in making upon the top of the head, or rather upon the lateral part of the brain, with an instrument I have invented, called the 'trepan,' an opening about the size of an angelot."

"God of mercy!" cried Catherine de Medici, indignantly. "Put the knife to the king's head! And you would dare to do it!"

"Yes, Madame," replied Ambroise, simply.

"But it would be murder!" exclaimed Catherine.

"Why, Madame," added Ambroise, "I propose scientifically and carefully to bore a hole in the head, which is only what the blind and heedless do every day upon the battle-field. Yet see how many such wounds are cured!"

"Will you be answerable for the king's life, Master Ambroise?" asked the cardinal: "that is the question."

"God alone has the life and death of mortals in His hand, as you should know better than I, Monsieur le Cardinal. All that I can promise is that this is the last and only chance of saving the king. Yes, it is the only chance; but it is only a chance."

"But you say that your operation may be successful, do you not, Ambroise?" said Le Balafré. "Tell me, have you ever performed it successfully?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied Paré, — "only a short time since upon Monsieur de la Bretesche, at the sign of the Red Rose, in Rue de la Harpe; and to mention a case of which Monseigneur may perhaps have some knowledge, I performed it at the siege of Calais upon Monsieur de Pienne, who was wounded while fighting at the breach."

It may have been with intention that Ambroise Paré recalled the memory of Calais. It is certain that he succeeded, and that the Duc de Guise seemed moved.

"Yes, I remember," said he. "I have no longer any hesitation; I consent to the operation."

"And so do I," said Mary Stuart, enlightened, no doubt, by her love.

"But not I!" cried Catherine.

"What, Madame! not when you have been told that it is *our* only chance?" said Mary.

"Who says so?" demanded the queen-mother. "Master Ambroise Paré, a heretic, forsooth! Besides, it is not the opinion of the physicians."

"No, Madame," said Chapelain; "and these gentlemen and myself protest against the remedy that Master Paré proposes."

"Ah, do you hear?" cried Catherine, in triumph.

Le Balafré, in great agitation, led the queen-mother into the embrasure of a window, and said in an undertone, with clinched teeth, —

"Madame, hearken to me! You wish that your son should die, and the Prince de Condé should live! You are in accord with the Bourbons and the Montmorencys! The bargain is made, and the spoils divided in advance!

I know everything! Take care! I know everything, I tell you!"

But Catherine de Médicis was not one of those who are easily intimidated; and the Duc de Guise made a serious mistake. She only understood the better how essential it was for her to adopt a bold course, since her enemy thus removed his mask. She cast a withering glance upon him, and breaking away from his grasp with a sudden movement, ran to the folding-doors, and herself threw them open to their fullest extent.

"Monsieur le Chancelier!" she cried.

L'Hôpital, according to the orders he had received, was waiting in the large hall. He had collected there all of the partisans of the queen-mother and the princes whom he had been able to find.

At Catherine's call he came quickly forward, and the group of nobles pressed inquisitively toward the open door.

"Monsieur le Chancelier," continued Catherine, raising her voice that she might be heard by all, "it is proposed to authorize a violent and desperate operation upon the person of the king. Master Paré proposes to pierce his head with an instrument of his own devising. I, his mother, with these three physicians, protest against this crime. Monsieur le Chancelier, record my protest."

"Close that door!" cried the Duc de Guise.

Despite the remonstrances of the gentlemen collected in the great hall, Gabriel did as the duke ordered.

The chancellor alone remained in the king's chamber.

"Now, Monsieur le Chancelier," said Le Balafre, "be pleased to understand that the operation which has been mentioned is absolutely necessary; and that the queen and myself, lieutenant-general of the kingdom, will be answerable, if not for the operation, at all events for the surgeon."

"And I," cried Ambroise Paré, "at this supreme moment, assume all the responsibility that you choose to impose upon me; yes, I consent that my own life may pay the forfeit if I do not succeed in saving the king's. But, alas! it is full time. Look at the king! look!"

François lay there, livid, without motion, and with dull, lifeless eyes, and seemed to see and hear nothing, — scarcely to exist, in fact. He no more responded to Mary's caresses or her beloved voice.

"Oh, hasten, hasten, in the name of God!" she said appealingly to Ambroise. "Oh, try to save the life of the king, and I will protect yours!"

"I have no right to forbid these proceedings," said the impassive chancellor; "but it is my duty to state the protest of Madame the Queen-mother."

"Monsieur de l'Hôpital, you are no longer chancellor," rejoined the Duc de Guise, coldly. "Go on, Ambroise," he said to the surgeon.

"We will withdraw," said Chapelain, speaking for the physicians.

"So be it," replied Ambroise. "I must have most perfect quiet around me; so leave me, if you please, gentlemen. For the sake of being sole master for the moment, I assume the sole responsibility."

For some moments Catherine neither spoke nor moved. She had withdrawn to a window, and was looking out into the courtyard, where there was a great commotion; but in the crisis that was approaching, no one beside herself paid any heed to the tumult without.

All others, even the chancellor himself, had their eyes riveted upon Ambroise Paré, who had resumed the cool demeanor of a great surgeon, and was making ready his instruments.

But just as he was leaning toward François, the uproar

came nearer, and seemed to be in the adjoining hall. A bitter and joyous smile played about the bloodless lips of Catherine. The door was violently thrown open ; and the Constable de Montmorency, in full armor, appeared threateningly upon the threshold.

"I arrive most opportunely," cried the constable.

"What means this intrusion?" demanded the Duc de Guise, laying his hand upon his sword.

Ambroise Paré had no choice but to stay his hand. Twenty gentlemen accompanied Montmorency, and poured into the chamber after him. At his side were Antoine de Navarre and the Prince de Condé. Moreover, the queen-mother and L'Hôpital joined them. There was no longer any hope of maintaining the mastery even by force.

"In my turn," said Ambroise Paré, hopelessly, "I withdraw."

"Master Paré," cried Mary Stuart, "I, the queen, command you to proceed with your operation!"

"But, Madame," replied the surgeon, "I told you that most perfect quiet was necessary ! and you see !" he added expressively, pointing to the constable and his train.

"Monsieur Chapelain," said he to the first physician, "try your injection."

"That will take but an instant," said Chapelain, quickly. "Everything is prepared."

With the assistance of his *confrères*, he injected his preparation into the king's ear.

Mary Stuart, the Guises, Gabriel, and Ambroise allowed them to do as they chose, and said nothing ; they were completely crushed, and as if turned to stone.

The constable chattered away like a madman.

"This is very well !" said he, well pleased with the forced docility of Master Paré. "When I think that if it had

not been for me you would have opened the king's head in such fashion ! Kings of France are only wounded so upon the battle-field, do you see ? The steel of an enemy may touch them, but a surgeon's knife never ! ”

And then, exulting over the dejected attitude of the Duc de Guise, he continued, —

“ It was quite time that I should arrive, thank God ! Ah, Messieurs, they tell me that you proposed to cut off the head of my dear brave nephew, the Prince de Condé ! But you aroused the old lion in his lair, and behold him ! I have delivered the prince ; I have addressed the States-General, who are restive under your oppression. I have, as constable, dismissed the guards you stationed at the gates of Orléans. Since when has it been customary thus to furnish guards to the king, as if he were not safe in the midst of his loyal subjects ? ”

“ Of what king are you speaking ? ” demanded Ambroise Paré ; “ for soon there will be no king save Charles IX., — for you see, Messieurs,” said he to the physicians, “ that despite your injection, the brain is already affected, and is beginning to be filled.”

Catherine de Médicis clearly read in the hopeless air of Ambroise that all hope was at an end.

“ Your reign is over, then, Monsieur,” she could not forbear remarking to Le Balafre.

François II. at that moment suddenly raised himself in bed, opened his great staring eyes, moved his lips as if struggling to pronounce a name, then fell heavily back upon his pillow.

He was dead.

Ambroise Paré, with a sorrowful gesture, made the fact known to those present.

“ Ah, Madame, Madame ! you have killed your son ! ”

cried Mary Stuart to Catherine, leaping toward her in a frenzy of despair.

The queen-mother bestowed upon her daughter-in-law a venomous, icy glance, in which shone all the hatred she had concealed for eighteen months.

"You, my dear," she sneered, "have no longer the right to speak thus, remember; for you are no longer queen. Ah, I beg your pardon! — queen of Scotland. And we will send you over as soon as possible to reign in your land of fogs."

Mary, with the reaction inevitable after her first burst of grief, fell on her knees, exhausted and sobbing bitterly, at the foot of the bed where the king was lying.

"Madame de Fiesque," continued Catherine, calmly, "go at once and bring the Duc d'Orléans."

"Messieurs," she resumed, glancing at the Duc de Guise and the cardinal, "the States-General, which were devoted to you, it may be, an hour since, are now at our service, be assured. It is understood between Monsieur de Bourbon and myself that I shall be queen-regent, and he lieutenant-general of the kingdom; but you are *still* grand master, Monsieur de Guise. Therefore perform the functions of your office, and announce the demise of King François II."

"The king is dead!" said Le Balaféré, in a deep, hollow voice.

The king-at-arms cried aloud on the threshold of the apartment, according to ancient ceremonial, —

"The king is dead! The king is dead! The king is dead! Pray God for the salvation of his soul!"

"Long live the king!" replied the first gentleman of the chamber.

At the same moment Madame de Fiesque brought the

Duc d'Orléans to the queen-mother's side, who took him by the hand, and led him out to show to the courtiers, who were lustily shouting, —

"Long live our good king, Charles IX.!"

"Our fortunes are at an end now!" said the cardinal, gloomily, to his brother, as they were left standing almost alone.

"Ours, perhaps, but not that of our family," replied the ambitious Duc de Guise. "We must think now about preparing the way for my son."

"How can we renew our alliance with the queen-mother?"

"Oh, let us leave her to quarrel with her Bourbons and her Huguenots," said Le Balafre.

They left the room by a secret door, still busily conversing.

"Alas! alas!" murmured Mary Stuart, kissing the cold hand of poor François; "there is no one but me to weep for him, my poor darling, who loved me so dearly."

"And me, Madame," said Gabriel de Montgommery, who had thus far kept in the background, but now came forward with tears in his eyes.

"Oh, thanks, my friend!" said Mary, with a grateful look in which her whole soul shone out.

"And I will do more than weep," said Gabriel, beneath his breath, following from afar, with an angry eye, the Constable de Montmorency, who was strutting about beside Catherine de Médicis. "Yes, perhaps I may avenge him, when I begin anew the unfinished work of my own vengeance. Now that this constable has returned to power, the contest between us is not at an end!"

Thus, even in the presence of death Gabriel, alas! kept in view his personal affairs.

Surely Regnier la Planche was right in saying "that it is a bad thing to be king simply to die."

And he was equally right when he added, "During the reign of François II. France was the theatre whereon were enacted many horrible tragedies which posterity will contemplate with wonder and abhorrence."

CHAPTER LV.

ADIEU, FRANCE !

ON the 15th of August, 1561, eight months after the demise of François II., Mary Stuart was at Calais, on the point of taking her departure for her Scottish kingdom.

During these eight months she had been engaged in an unceasing struggle, day by day and hour by hour, with Catherine de Médicis and with her uncles as well, who were as impatient as the regent, though for different reasons, to have her well away from France; but Mary found it hard to make up her mind to leave behind her that fair land where she had been a queen, so happy and so well beloved. Even in the sorrowful memories which recalled her premature widowhood, these loved spots held for her a poetic charm which made it difficult for her to tear herself away.

Mary Stuart not only felt that poetic charm, but she herself gave expression to it. She not only wept for the demise of François as a loving wife, but she sang of it like one of the Muses. Brantôme, in his admiration for her, has preserved for us the sweet, plaintive verses which she composed in her tribulation, and which bear comparison with the most notable poetry of that age :

“ En mon triste et doux chant,
D'un ton fort lamentable,
Je jette un deuil tranchant

De perte incomparable,
Et en soupirs croissans
Passent mes meilleurs ans.

“ Fut-il un tel malheur
De dure destinée,
Ni si triste douleur
De dame fortunée,
Que mon cœur et mon œil
Voient en bière et cercueil !

“ Que dans mon doux printemps,
À fleur de ma jeunesse,
Toutes les peines sens
D'une extrême tristesse
Et en rien n'ai plaisir
Qu'en regret et désir.

“ Ce qui m'était plaisant
Me devient peine dure !
Le jour le plus luisant
Est pour moi nuit obscure,
Et n'est rien si exquis
Qui de moi soit requis !

“ Si en quelque séjour,
Soit en bois, soit en pré,
Soit à l'aube du jour
Ou soit sur la vesprée,
Sans cesse mon cœur sent
Le regret d'un absent.

“ Si parfois vers les cieux
Viens à dresser ma vue,
Le doux trait de ses yeux
Je vois en une nue.
Si les baisse vers l'eau,
Vois comme en un tombeau.

“ Si je suis en repos
Sommeillant sur ma couche,
J'oy qu'il me tient propos,
Je le sens qui me touche !

En labeur, en recoy,
Toujours est près de moi.

“ Mets, chanson, ici fin
À ta triste complainte
Dont sera le refrain :
Amour vraie et sans feinte
Qui pour séparation
N'aura diminution.”¹

¹ “ Sad and plaintive is my song
Of the days now gone forever ;
And I mourn the whole day long
The loss of him whom I shall never
More behold. In grief and pain, alas !
The fairest years of my life must pass.

“ How pitiless and stern is fate !
That I, to fortune born and pleasure,
Must bend beneath the cruel weight
Of pain and sorrow without measure ;
While Destiny thus bounds my whole career
By the dark shadow of the funeral bier.

“ In the bright springtime of my life,
Of my youth the very flower,
A melancholy, widowed wife,
I sit and sob the weary hour ;
Nor can my heart a taste of joy acquire
In aught save vain regret or vain desire.

“ That to me now is bitter pain
Whereat my face was wont to lighten ;
And God's bright sunshine seeks in vain
The darkness of my night to brighten :
Nor in my sight is aught so fair or fine
As to arouse a wish that it were mine.

“ Wheresoe'er my steps may lead, —
Whether through the forest roaming,
Or perchance by flowery mead,
Or at dawn or in the gloaming, —

It was while at Reims, to which city she at first withdrew with her uncle De Lorraine, that Mary Stuart produced these melodious and touching strains. She remained in Champagne until the end of the spring. Then the religious troubles which had broken out in Scotland urgently demanded her presence in that country. On the other side, the almost passionate admiration which the boy Charles IX. expressed whenever he mentioned his sister-in-law disturbed the suspicious regent, Catherine. Therefore it was necessary that Mary Stuart should resign herself to depart.

She came to pay her parting respects to the court at St. Germain in July ; and the marks of devotion, of adoration almost, which were showered upon her there, served only to augment, if that were possible, her bitter regret.

Still my fond heart doth ceaselessly deplore,
And mourn the loss of him who is no more.

“ If to heaven my eyes I raise,
In some cloud-shape, outlined faintly,
I behold my dear one's face
Smiling with his smile so saintly ;
If my glance wanders o'er the ocean's wave,
I seem to see him beckoning from the grave.

“ If my eyes in slumber close,
I can hear his dear voice calling ;
And my soul with rapture glows
At his soft touch so lightly falling
Upon my cheek. Thus is he near me ever,
Whether I toil or rest ; nor can grim Death us sever.

“ Have done, O Muse, with thy sad strain !
What boots it to be ever singing ?
Yet of my song, this sweet refrain
Is ever in my ears ringing :
The love that 's true, with adoration blending,
In absence loseth nought ; its growth is never-ending.”

Her dowry, charged upon Touraine and Poitou, had been fixed at twenty thousand livres annually; she also carried many superb jewels with her to Scotland, and it was thought that the hope of obtaining such rich treasure might tempt some freebooter. Still more fear was entertained that her safety might be endangered by some act of violence on the part of Elizabeth of England, who already saw in the young Queen of Scots a dangerous rival. Consequently a number of gentlemen proposed to escort Mary to her own dominions; and when she reached Calais, she found herself attended not only by her uncles, but by Messieurs de Damville and de Brantôme, — in fact, by the better part of that splendid, chivalrous court.

She found two galleys awaiting her in the harbor of Calais, ready to set sail as soon as she should give the word; but she remained at Calais six days, so painful was the final parting from those who had accompanied her thus far on her way.

At last the 15th of August, as we have said, was definitely fixed upon for her departure. It was a gloomy, threatening day, but without wind or rain.

Upon the shore, and before setting foot upon the deck of the vessel which was to bear her away, Mary, as a mark of her gratitude to all who had thus escorted her to the utmost verge of their country, gave each of them her hand to kiss as a last farewell.

They all came forward, and kneeling before her one after another pressed their lips upon her beloved hand.

Last of all was a gentleman who had never ceased to follow in Mary's train since she left St. Germain, but had always kept in the background on the road, hidden by his broad hat and the ample folds of his cloak, and had neither made himself known nor spoken to a soul.

But when he came in turn to kneel before the queen, hat in hand, Mary recognized Gabriel de Montgommery.

"Ah, is it you, Count?" said she. "I am indeed happy to see you once more, my faithful friend, who wept with me for my poor dead king. But why have you never spoken to me, if you were with these other gentlemen?"

"I felt that I must see you without being seen, Madame," replied Gabriel. "In my loneliness I could better collect my remembrances, and enjoy more fully the pleasure that it gave me to perform so grateful a duty."

"Thanks once more for this final proof of your attachment, Monsieur le Comte," said Mary. "I should be glad if I might show my gratitude otherwise than by mere words. I can do nothing more, unless it please you to accompany me to my poor Scotland with Messieurs Damville and Brantôme —"

"Ah, that would be my most devout wish, Madame!" cried Gabriel; "but another duty binds me to France. One who is dearer to me than life, and consecrated in my eyes, and whom I have not seen for more than two years, is expecting me at this moment."

"Do you mean Diane de Castro?" asked Mary, eagerly.

"Yes, Madame," said Gabriel. "By a letter I received last month she requested me to be at St. Quentin to-day, August 15. I shall not be with her until to-morrow; but whatever may have been her motive in summoning me, she will forgive me, I am sure, when she learns that I did not desire to leave you until you were actually leaving France."

"Dear Diane!" remarked Mary, pensively; "yes, she also loved me well, was like a sister to me. Hold, Monsieur de Montgommery; take this ring to her as a re-

membrance from me, and go to her as quickly as you can. She may need your help ; and when her welfare is concerned, I do not wish to detain you. Adieu ! adieu, all my dear friends ! They wait for me, and I must go, — alas ! I must."

She tore herself away from the arms of those who would still have held her, stepped aboard the small boat, and was at once transferred to Monsieur de Mévillon's galley, followed by the envied gentlemen who were to go with her to Scotland.

But even as Scotland could not supply the void left by France in Mary's heart, so those who accompanied her could not make her forget those she had left behind ; indeed, she seemed to love the latter the more dearly. Standing at the stern of the galley, she never ceased to wave her handkerchief, wet with tears, to the kinsfolk and friends whom she left upon the shore.

At last they were in the open sea ; and Mary's eyes were drawn in spite of herself toward a vessel which was just entering the harbor she had quitted, and which her gaze followed longingly in envy of its destination. Suddenly the vessel pitched forward, as if she had struck beneath the water-line ; and trembling from stem to stern, she began to sink, amid the piercing shrieks of her crew. It was all done so rapidly that she was out of sight before Monsieur de Mévillon had time to send a skiff to her assistance. For an instant a few heads could be seen struggling in the water near the spot where the vessel had gone down, but they disappeared one by one before they could be reached, although the men pulled lustily ; and the skiff returned without having saved a single one of the poor wretches.

" Oh, Lord ! oh, my God ! what a fearful omen for my voyage is this ! " cried Mary Stuart.

Meanwhile the wind had freshened ; and the galley began to attain some speed, so that the crew had an opportunity to rest. Mary, seeing that she was rapidly leaving the shore behind her, leaned against the bulwarks with her eyes fixed upon the harbor, her sight dimmed by great tears, and repeated again and again, —

“Adieu, France ! adieu, France !”

She remained in that position nearly five hours, — that is to say, until night fell ; indeed, she would probably not have thought of leaving the deck even then, had not Brantôme come to inform her that her presence was awaited at supper.

Thereupon, weeping and sobbing more bitterly than before, —

“Now, dear France,” she cried, “I lose thee indeed ; since Night, jealous of my last happiness, pulls her dark veil before my eyes to deprive me of my pleasure in gazing at thee. So adieu, dear France ! I shall never see thee more !”

Then with a sign to Brantôme that she would follow him at once, she drew forth her tablets, seated herself upon a bench, and wrote these familiar lines by the last rays of daylight, —

“Adieu, plaisant pays de France !
 O ma patrie
 La plus chérie,
 Qui a nourri ma jeune enfance !
 Adieu, France ! adieu, mes beaux jours !
 La nef qui disjoint nos amours
 N’a en de moi que la moitié :
 Une part te reste, elle est tienne.”
 Je la fie à ton amitié,
 Pour que de l’autre il te souviennne.”¹

¹ “Farewell to thee, thou pleasant shore,
 The loved, the cherished home to me,

At last she went below, and said as she joined her shipmates who were awaiting her, —

“I have done just the opposite of what the Queen of Carthage did; for Dido, when Æneas left her, gazed ceaselessly at the waves, while I find it hard to take my eyes from the land.”

They urged her to be seated, and to sup with them; but she could eat nothing, and withdrew at once to her cabin, charging the helmsman to arouse her at break of day if the land were still in sight.

On this point at least fortune smiled upon poor Mary; for the wind died away, and the galley scarcely moved during the night, except with the aid of oars; so that when day broke they were still within sight of France.

The helmsman entered the queen's cabin, as she had ordered him to do; but he found her already awake and seated upon her berth, gazing out through an open port-hole at the beloved shore.

However, this pleasure was of short duration; for the wind freshened again, and France was soon lost to sight. Mary had only one hope left: that was that an English fleet would appear in the offing, and they would be obliged to turn back. But that last hope proved futile, like the others; a fog, so dense that they could not see

Of infant joy a dream that's o'er!
Farewell, dear France! farewell to thee!

“The sail that wafts me bears away
From thee but half my soul alone:
Its fellow-half will fondly stay,
And back to thee has faithful flown.

“I trust it to thy gentle care;
For all that here remains with me
Lives but to think of all that's there,
To love and to remember thee.”

from one end of the vessel to the other, came down upon the ocean, — almost miraculously, as it seemed, being midsummer. They sailed on at hazard, incurring the risk of going astray, but avoiding all danger of being seen by the enemy.

At last, on the third day, the fog lifted; and they found themselves close upon a rocky shore, where the galley would doubtless have gone to pieces if they had sailed two cables' lengths farther. The pilot took an observation, and found that he was off the coast of Scotland, and having skilfully extricated the vessel from the breakers which surrounded her, made the port of Leith, near Edinburgh.

The wits who accompanied Mary said that they had landed in a fog in a mischief-making country of marplots.¹ Mary's coming was entirely unexpected; so that she and her suite were, perforce, content to make their way to Edinburgh upon donkeys, wretchedly equipped, many of which were without saddles, and had nought but cords for reins and stirrups. Mary could not refrain from contrasting these sorry nags with the superb French pal-freys which she was accustomed to see caracoling about in the hunting-field, or the lists. She shed a few tears of regret as she compared the fair land she had left with that upon which she now stood. But soon, with her fascinating grace, and struggling to smile through her tears, she said, —

“I must bear my ills in patience, since I have exchanged my paradise for a hell.”

In such manner did Mary Stuart arrive on British soil. We have narrated elsewhere (“Les Stuarts”) the story

¹ It is impossible to translate this passage so as adequately to convey the meaning of the text, “on avait pris terre par un *brouillard* dans un pays *brouillé* et *brouillon*.” — TRANSLATOR.

of the rest of her life and her demise ; and how impious England, the arch-enemy of all that France holds sacred, slew grace in her person, as it had already slain inspiration in that of Jeanne d'Arc, and was subsequently to make an end of genius in the person of Napoleon.

CONCLUSION.

GABRIEL did not reach St. Quentin until August 16. At the entrance to the town he found Jean Peuquoy awaiting him.

"Ah, here you are at last, Monsieur le Comte!" cried the honest weaver. "I was sure that you would come! But you are too late, alas! too late!"

"What! too late?" asked Gabriel, in alarm.

"Alas! yes. Did not Madame Diane de Castro in her letter ask you to be here yesterday, the 15th?"

"To be sure," said Gabriel; "but no particular stress was laid upon the date, nor did Madame de Castro say why she desired my presence."

"Well, Monsieur le Comte," rejoined Jean, "yesterday was the day on which Madame de Castro — I should say, Sister Bénie — pronounced the words which make her a nun forever, with no possibility of returning to the world."

"Ah!" said Gabriel, turning pale.

"Whereas, if you had been at hand," continued Jean, "you might perhaps have been able to prevent what is now an accomplished fact."

"No," said Gabriel, gloomily, "no, I could not, I ought not, nor would I have attempted even to oppose that step. Providence doubtless kept me at Calais, for my heart would have broken by its helplessness in the face of her sacrificial act; and the poor, dear, afflicted soul which thus gave itself to God's service might have had

to suffer more from my presence than she did when left alone at that solemn moment."

"Oh, but she was not alone," said Jean.

"Of course you were there, Jean, and Babette, and the poor and unfortunate, her devoted friends."

"We were not the only ones, Monsieur le Comte," said Jean. "Sister Bénie's mother was also with her."

"Who, — Madame de Poitiers?" exclaimed Gabriel.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte, Madame de Poitiers herself, who, on receipt of a letter from her daughter, hastened hither from her retirement at Chaumont-sur-Loire, was present at the ceremonial yesterday, and should be with the new nun at this moment."

"Oh!" said Gabriel, in terror, "why did Madame de Castro send for that woman?"

"Why, Monseigneur, as she said to Babette, that woman is, after all, her mother."

"Alas! I begin to think I ought to have been here yesterday," said Gabriel. "If Madame de Poitiers is here, it can be with no good purpose, nor to fulfil any pious maternal duty. Let us go to the Benedictine convent, if you please, Master Jean. I am in greater haste than ever now to see Madame de Castro, for I fear that she needs me. Come, let us hurry!"

Gabriel was shown without objection into the parlor of the convent, where he had been expected since the preceding day.

Diane was waiting in the parlor with her mother.

Gabriel, upon seeing her once more after so long a separation, was carried away by an irresistible impulse, and fell on his knees, pale and dejected, before the grating which separated them forever from each other.

"My sister! my sister!" was all he could say.

"My brother!" replied Sister Bénie, softly.

A tear rolled slowly down her cheek ; but at the same time she smiled as the angels should smile.

Gabriel, turning his head slightly, met the gaze of the other Diane, Madame de Poitiers. She was laughing, as demons should laugh.

But Gabriel, with careless contempt for her exasperating demeanor, concentrated his regard and his thought entirely upon Sister Bénie.

"My sister!" he repeated eagerly, and with bitter anguish.

Diane de Poitiers at this point coldly remarked, —

"It is as your sister in Jesus Christ, doubtless, Monsieur, that you call by that title her who yesterday was still Madame de Castro?"

"What do you mean, Madame? Great God! what do mean?" asked Gabriel, with a shudder, as he rose to his feet.

Diane de Poitiers, without replying directly to his question, addressed her daughter: —

"The time has arrived, my child, I think, to reveal to you the secret of which I spoke yesterday, and which, in my opinion, my bounden duty forbids me to conceal from you any longer."

"Oh, what can it be?" cried Gabriel, distractedly.

"My child," continued Madame de Poitiers, calmly, "as I have told you, it was not simply to give you my blessing that I have emerged from the retirement in which I have been living for nearly two years, thanks to Monsieur de Montgommery. Pray do not consider my words ironical, Monsieur," she added in a tone of bitter irony in reply to a gesture of Gabriel's. "In truth, I am extremely obliged to you for having torn me away, with or without violence, from an impious and corrupt world. I am happy now! The divine grace has touched me, and

my whole heart is filled with the love of God. To show my gratitude to you, I wish to save you from the commission of a sin, — a crime, it may be."

"Oh, what can it be?" It was Sister Bénie who asked the question now with fast-beating heart.

"My child," continued Diane de Poitiers, in her infernal, cool tones, "I imagine that I might yesterday, with a single word, have arrested upon your lips the sacred vows you were about to utter. But was it for me, miserable sinner that I am, and so happy to be free from earthly bonds, — was it for me to steal from God a soul which was about to confide itself to Him, free and pure? No! and I held my peace."

"I dare not guess! I dare not!" muttered Gabriel.

"To-day, my child," the ex-favorite resumed, "I break my silence, because I see from Monsieur de Montgomery's grief and earnestness that you still possess his entire soul. Now he must make up his mind to forget you; he must do it. But if he continues to soothe himself with the fancy that you may be his sister, the daughter of the Comte de Montgommery, he can allow his memory to return to you now and then without remorse. That would be a crime! — a crime to which I, having been converted since yesterday, do not propose to be accessory. You are *not* the sister of Monsieur le Comte, but are really the daughter of King Henri II., whom Monsieur le Comte so unfortunately slew in that fatal tournament."

"Oh, horror!" cried Sister Bénie, hiding her face in her hands.

"You lie, Madame!" said Gabriel, vehemently. "It must be that you lie! Where is your proof that you speak the truth?"

"Here," replied Diane de Poitiers, in a most peaceful tone, handing him a paper which she took from her bosom.

Gabriel seized the paper with trembling hand, and read it eagerly.

"It is a letter from your father," continued Madame de Poitiers, "written a few days before his death, as you see. He complains of my cruelty, as you will see again; but he submits, as you may also see, reflecting that in any event I shall soon be his wife, and that the lover will have suffered disappointment only to make the husband's happiness more pure and perfect. Oh, the words of that letter, which is signed and dated, are in no wise equivocal! Am I not right? So you see, Monsieur de Montgomery, that it would have been criminal for you to think of Sister Bénie; for you are bound by no tie of blood to her who is now the spouse of Jesus Christ. And in saving you from such impiety, I hope that I have acquitted my debt to you, and have more than repaid you for the bliss I enjoy in my solitude. We are quits now, Monsieur de Montgomery, and I have no more to say to you."

Gabriel, while this bitter, mocking speech was being delivered, had finished reading the baleful but sacred letter. It left no room whatever for doubt. It was to Gabriel like the voice of his father rising from the tomb to make known the truth.

When the wretched young man raised his wild, haggard eyes, he saw Diane de Castro lying unconscious before a *prie-Dieu*.

He rushed instinctively toward her; but the heavy iron bars arrested his steps.

As he turned back he saw Diane de Poitiers, and upon her lips was playing a smile of placid contentment.

Mad with grief, he took two steps toward her with uplifted hand.

But he stopped in terror at his own act; and beating his brow like an insane man, he cried simply,—

“Adieu, Diane ! adieu !” and fled.

If he had remained a second more, he could not have forborne to annihilate that blaspheming mother like the viper that she was !

Outside the convent Jean Peuquoy was anxiously awaiting him.

“Do not question me ! Ask me nothing !” exclaimed Gabriel at once, in a frenzy of despair.

And as honest Peuquoy gazed at him in sorrowful astonishment, he said more gently,—

“Forgive me ! I fear I am almost mad. I cannot collect my thoughts, you see. It is to avoid the necessity of thinking that I propose to go, to fly, to Paris. Go with me, if you will, my friend, as far as the gate where I left my horse. But, in God’s name, talk about yourself ; say nothing of me or my affairs !”

The worthy weaver, as much to comply with Gabriel’s wish as to try to distract his thoughts, went on to tell how Babette was marvellously well, and had recently presented him with a young Peuquoy,—a splendid fellow ; how their brother Pierre had established himself in business as an armorer at St. Quentin ; and how, only the month before, they had had news from Martin-Guerre, by a Picardy trooper returning home, and had learned that he was still happy with his reformed Bertrande.

But it must be confessed that Gabriel, who was, as it were, made blind and deaf by his grief, did not understand and only partly heard this joyous narration.

However, when he and Jean Peuquoy arrived at the Paris gate, he warmly pressed the honest burgher’s hand.

“Adieu, my friend,” said he. “Thanks for your affectionate kindness. Remember me most kindly to all your loving circle. I am glad to know that you are

happy ; think sometimes in your prosperity of me in my wretchedness."

And without waiting for any other response than the tears which shone in Jean's eyes, Gabriel mounted his horse, and set off at a gallop.

When he reached Paris (as if fate had determined to overwhelm him with affliction of every sort at once), he found that Aloyse, his dear nurse, had died, after a short illness, without having seen him again.

The next day he called upon Admiral de Coligny.

"Monsieur l'Amiral," said he, "I know that the persecutions and religious wars will soon begin anew, despite all the efforts to prevent them. Understand that henceforth I can offer to the Reformed cause not only my heart, but my sword as well. My life is good for nothing except to serve you ; so take it, and spare it not. Moreover, in your ranks I can best defend myself against one of my enemies, and finish the punishment of the other."

Gabriel had in his mind the queen-regent and the constable.

It is needless to say that Coligny enthusiastically welcomed the invaluable auxiliary whose courage and vigor had been put to the proof so many times.

The count's history from that moment is identical with that of the religious wars which drenched the reign of Charles IX. with blood.

Gabriel de Montgomery played a terrible part in those wars ; and at every momentous crisis the mere mention of his name drove the color from the cheeks of Catherine de Médicis.

When, after the massacre at Vassy in 1562, Rouen and the whole of Normandy openly declared themselves for the Huguenots, the Comte de Montgomery was named

as the principal author of this uprising of an entire province.

The same year the Comte de Montgomery was at the battle of Dreux, where he performed prodigies of valor.

It was he, they said, who wounded with a pistol-ball the Constable de Montmorency, who commanded in chief, and would have made an end of him if the Prince de Porcien had not sheltered the constable and received him as a prisoner.

Every one knows that a month after this battle, where Le Balafré had wrested victory from the constable's unskilful hands, the noble Duc de Guise was treacherously murdered before Orléans by the fanatic Poltrot.

Montmorency, relieved of a rival, but also deprived of his ally, was less fortunate at the battle of St. Denis in 1567 than at that of Dreux.

The Scotchman Robert Stuart called upon him to surrender. He replied by striking him across the face with the flat of his sword, whereupon some one fired a pistol at him (the constable); the ball pierced his side, and he fell, mortally wounded.

Through the stream of blood which obscured his sight he thought that he recognized the features of Gabriel.

The constable breathed his last the following day.

Although he had now no direct personal foes, the Comte de Montgomery did not lessen the force of his blows. He seemed invincible and immortal.

When Catherine de Médicis asked who had compelled Béarn to submit to the King of Navarre, and had caused the Prince of Béarn to be recognized as general-in-chief of the Huguenots, the answer was — Montgomery.

When, on the day following the massacre of St. Bartholomew (1572), the queen-mother, in her thirst for vengeance, inquired, not as to those who had perished, but

as to those who had escaped, the first name mentioned was — Montgomery.

Montgomery threw himself into Rochelle with Lanoue. The town sustained nine fierce assaults, and cost the royal army forty thousand men. In the capitulation which ensued, it retained its freedom ; and Gabriel was allowed to depart, safe and sound.

He then made his way into Sancerre, which was besieged by the governor of Berri. He was well skilled, our readers will remember, in the defence of beleaguered towns. A handful of Sancerrois, with no other arms than iron-shod clubs, held out for four months against a body of six thousand soldiers. When at last they capitulated, they obtained the same terms granted at Rochelle, — liberty of conscience and immunity of person.

Catherine de Médicis viewed with ever-growing fury the continual escapes of her old unconquerable foe.

Montgomery left Poitou, which was in a blaze, and returned to Normandy to rekindle the flames which were subsiding there.

Setting out from St. Lô, within three days he had taken Carentan and despoiled Valognes of all her supplies. All the Norman nobility ranged themselves under his standard.

Catherine de Médicis and the king at once put three armies in the field, and proclaimed the *ban* and the *arrière-ban* in Mans and in Perche. The royal forces were led by the Duc de Matignon.

This time Montgomery no longer fought individually. Lost in the ranks of the Reformers, he devoted himself to thwarting Charles IX., and had his army, as the king had his.

He formed an admirable plan, which bade fair to assure him a brilliant victory.

He left Matignon besieging St. Lô with his whole force, secretly quitted the town, and made his way to Domfront. There François du Hallot was to join him with all the cavalry of Bretagne, Anjou, and the Caux country. With these forces he proposed to fall unexpectedly upon the royal army before St. Lô, which, being thus caught between two fires, would be annihilated.

But treachery conquered the unconquerable. An ensign warned Matignon of Montgomery's secret departure for Domfront, whither he was accompanied by only forty horsemen.

Matignon cared much less about reducing St. Lô than about capturing Montgomery; so he left the siege in charge of one of his inferior officers, and hastened to Domfront with two regiments of foot, six hundred horse, and a strong artillery force.

Any other than Gabriel de Montgomery would have surrendered without entering upon a resistance sure to be of no effect; but he, with his forty men, determined to show a bold front to that army.

In De Thou's history the incredible narrative of that siege may be read.

Domfront held out for twelve days, during which time the Comte de Montgomery made seven furious sallies; at last, when the walls of the town, riddled and tottering, were practically in the enemies' hands, Gabriel abandoned them, but only to ensconce himself in what was called the Tower of Guillaume de Bellême, and fight on.

He had only thirty men with him.

Matignon ordered to the assault a battery of five pieces of heavy artillery, a hundred cuirassiers, seven hundred musketeers, and a hundred pikemen.

The attack lasted five hours; and six hundred cannon-shot were fired into the old donjon.

In the evening Montgomery had but sixteen men left; but he still held out. He passed the night working at the breach like a common laborer.

The assault began again with daybreak. Matignon had received reinforcements during the night, and had under his command around the tower of the Bellême donjon and its seventeen defenders fifteen thousand soldiers and eighteen pieces of artillery!

The courage of the besieged did not fail; but their powder was exhausted.

Montgomery, rather than fall into the hands of his enemies alive, determined to fall upon his own sword; but Matignon sent him a flag of truce, the bearer of which swore in the name of his chief "that his life should be spared, and he should be allowed to depart."

Montgomery thereupon gave himself up, trusting to the oath. He should have remembered the fate of Castelnau.

On the same day he was sent to Paris in fetters. Catherine de Médicis at last had him in her power. It was by treachery, to be sure; but what mattered that? Charles IX. was dead; and pending the return of Henri III. from Poland she was queen-regent and omnipotent.

Montgomery was dragged before parliament, and condemned to death June 26, 1574.

For fourteen years he had been fighting against the wife and children of Henri II.

On the 27th of June, the Comte de Montgomery — to whom, in mere refinement of cruelty, the extraordinary torture had been applied — was carried to the scaffold and beheaded. His body was subsequently drawn and quartered.

Catherine de Médicis was present at the execution.

Thus closed the career of that extraordinary man, —

one of the noblest and bravest souls that the sixteenth century had seen. He had never risen above the second rank, but had always shown himself worthy of a place in the first. His death fulfilled to the letter the predictions of Nostradamus, —

“ Enfin, l'aimera, puis las ! le tuera
Dame du roy.”

Diane de Castro did not survive him. She had died the year before, abbess of the Benedictines of St. Quentin.

THE END.



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